

# WATCHUNG BOROUGH COUNCIL

## MINUTES

JANUARY 1 , 2008

12:00 Noon

**MAYOR'S STATEMENT:** Mayor Ellis called the Reorganization meeting to order at 12:00 P.M. and made the following statement: Under the provisions of N.J.S.A. 10:4-6 et seq., notice of the time and place of this meeting has been posted and sent to the Courier News, the Echoes Sentinel, The Reporter and the Star Ledger by way of annual notice.

### **SALUTE TO THE FLAG AND ROLL CALL**

Franklin [ P ] Black [ P ] Mobus [ P ] Joren [ P ] Pote [ P ] Nehls [ P ]

Also present were Administrator/Clerk Laureen Fellin, Attorney Albert Cruz, Engineer Tom Herits and Deputy Clerk Michelle DeRocco.

There were approximately 65 people in the audience.

### **INVOCATION**

The Invocation was given by Reverend Barbara Peters, Wilson Memorial.

Mayor Ellis welcomed the dignitaries who were present: Senator Tom Kean, Assemblyman Jon Bramnick and Assemblyman Eric Munoz, and announced that they were here to make a special presentation to senior members of the Fire Department for their years of dedicated service to the Borough. Councilwoman Joren said this is a wonderful way to honor these volunteers who have a combined total of over 100 years of service to our Borough. She said these gentlemen personify the emergency service volunteers who leave their families at a moment's notice to put their lives on the line to help others in need. Mrs. Joren said her grandfather, Neil Stanziola, was a member of the Fire Department for many years and he loved it. She said when he was ill, the Department presented to him a helmet, therefore, it was an honor for her to be a part of this presentation today. Senator Kean and Assemblymen Bramnick and Munoz presented Joint Legislative Resolutions to Ralph LaCanna, Gerald Mobus, Donald Scotti, Albert Seidel, and Max Weber. John Blackadar, Claude Ford, and John Gausz were unable to attend today's meeting and will be presented with their resolutions at a later date. Senator Kean commented that although these resolutions were full of "whereas's" and "be it resolved's", the bottom line is that Watchung is a far better place due to the service, generosity, and volunteerism of these men. Assemblyman Munoz said that the reality of life does include emergencies and these volunteers have provided first class services to its residents. Mayor Ellis thanked Councilwoman Deb Joren, and Firemen Wayne Otto and Paul Ost for their role in making this happen.

### **OATH OF ALLEGIANCE AND OFFICE**

Stephen K. Pote - Councilmember

Judge Richard Sasso administered the Oath of Office to Stephen Pote as his daughter Jenny and fiancée Gloria stood by his side.

William Nehls - Councilmember

Judge Richard Sasso administered the Oath of Office to William Nehls as his wife Georgia and daughters Savannah and Scarlet stood by his side.

### **OATH OF ALLEGIANCE AND OFFICE**

Fire Chief - James DiPaolo

Assistant Fire Chief - Robert "Skip" Bell

Judge Sasso administered the Oaths of Office to Fire Chief James DiPaolo and Assistant Fire Chief Robert “Skip” Bell.

Rescue Squad Captain - Captain Adam B. Wexler

Judge Sasso administered the Oath of Office to Rescue Squad Captain Adam B. Wexler as his wife Jessica and two daughters stood by his side.

Rescue Squad First Lieutenant - Melissa Isidro was unable to attend today’s meeting.

### **NOMINATION FOR COUNCIL PRESIDENT**

Councilman Black nominated Councilman Franklin for the position of Council President, with a second by Councilman Mobus. Nominations were closed and the motion carried unanimously on roll call.

### **NOMINATION FOR LIAISON TO PLANNING BOARD**

Councilman Nehls nominated Councilman Pote for the position of Liaison to the Planning Board, with a second by Councilman Black. Nominations were closed and the motion carried unanimously on roll call.

### **RESOLUTIONS**

The following resolutions were unanimously adopted on roll call, with offering and seconding as indicated:

		<u>Offered</u>	<u>Seconded</u>	<u>Abstain</u>
R1:1/01/08 -	Adoption of Rules of Order	Joren	Black	
R2:	Designation of Official Newspapers	Pote	Black	
R3:	Designation of Depositories	Black	Franklin	
R4:	Appointment of Officials - 1-year term / Attorneys	Franklin	Black	Joren
R5:	Appointment of Officials - 1-year term / Professional Services, Fire Officials	Joren	Black	
R6:	Appointments - Boards, Committees, Commissions	Mobus	Black	
R7:	Re-establish Petty Cash Funds	Nehls	Black	
R8:	Temporary Budget	Black	Franklin	
R9:	Payment of Property Taxes	Pote	Black	
R10:	Authorize Borough Attorney to file Tax Appeals and Petitions on behalf of the Borough for 2008	Franklin	Black	
R11:	Appointment of JIF Commissioner and Alternate	Mobus	Black	

### **APPOINTMENT OF STANDING COMMITTEES**

Mayor Ellis announced the following Councilmanic Committees:

Administration & Finance – Nehls, Chair; Franklin, Pote  
Public Works – Mobus, Chair; Franklin, Pote  
Laws & Ordinance – Joren, Chair; Black, Franklin

Buildings and Public Affairs – (Buildings & Grounds) Pote, Chair; Mobus, Nehls  
(Public Affairs) Nehls, Chair; Black, Joren  
Police – Franklin, Chair; Black, Mobus  
Fire – Black, Chair; Mobus, Joren  
Special Liaison to Rescue Squad - Pote

## **RECOGNITION OF EMPLOYEE SERVICE**

### TWENTY YEARS

Sean Whelan, Police Chief  
Gene McAllister, Police Sergeant  
Robert Faust, Police Sergeant

### FIFTEEN YEARS

Marie Della Piazza, Construction Control Person  
Daniel Lorimor, Police Officer

### TEN YEARS

William Kelly, Police Detective  
Arthur Holzheimer, Police Officer  
Paulette Drogon, Welfare Director

### FIVE YEARS

Joseph Nicastro, Construction Inspector  
David Melchionda, Police Officer  
Michael Bouchard, Police Officer  
Martha Mejia, Custodial  
Miguel Mejia, Custodial  
Helder Peixoto, Police Dispatcher

## **MAYOR'S ADDRESS**

*As I look back and review 2007 it has been a rewarding year. Each member of council has continued their great dedication and service to our community and I am sure you will hear some brief comments from each.*

*As you can see we are in the process of redecorating these chambers. We will be adding new window treatments and continue that theme with highlights on the wall behind me. A new rug will be added to complete the redecorations. We are close to going to final bid on our “bonus” room behind the Engineering office and those plans should be under way by the end of this month. So we look forward to the move of those departments, now in the Texier building into this building this year. That will give us a unique space for the Historic Committee to house and display the many items relating to the history of Watchung and our area.*

*The rock wall screening has been completed behind the Court and Police station and parking has returned to normal. Finally, we are going to begin the restoration of Best Lake which includes dredging and a new dam. No more green lake.*

*The Library Committee is moving ahead on two fronts. They are creating two RFP's, one seeking an architect and another seeking a professional fund raising firm. I'm hopeful that they will out before Valentines Day. Any volunteers who are interested in helping with the fund raising, please contact me.*

*Although the weather did not cooperate, it did not in any way dampen our enthusiasm as we honored former Council President Elmer Spratford with the dedication of the park on Somerset Street in his name.*

*We have a preliminary report of a “wish list” on the use of the Ness property and this year we will bring more focus on its use.*

*We had a special presentation on Regional School Funding with regard to our per pupil cost at the High School. The attorney who is involved with several other regional districts made the presentation. Our choice to change the funding process under the current system is slim to none. We could join the current lawsuit. That will be a discussion item for our new budget. We did meet with a deputy commissioner of education and learned that the new County Superintendents will be charged with looking at regionalization in each county. We will continue to press our case with her and the report presented to the state education committee reviewing costs determined that fair share pupil costs were the best solution.*

*Once again we have had a very successful year in obtaining grant money. We have received \$457,505.89 and have been advised of an additional \$50,600 from Homeland security for training and equipment for our fire company. That will make the total \$508,105.89. Kudos to our Engineer, Tom Herits, for following up on these grant opportunities.*

*Changes occur every year and this past year our Police Chief, John Frosoni, retired and we thank him for his 26 years of service. Sean Whelan is our Acting Chief and will be sworn in a special meeting of our council on January 9<sup>th</sup> in the Performing Arts Center at Watchung Hills High School. You should plan to attend. Other changes include the decision of the Watchung Fire Company to carry on the service of the extrication. As in the past we will continue our cooperation with surrounding communities using mutual aid in this service as well as all services that are necessary to assure our residents their needs will be met. Chief Whelan has assumed me we will not miss a beat. I want to thank the Rescue Squad for their 18 years of service in extrication and their donation of rescue vehicle "80".*

*Finally the most disappointing item this year has been the decision of the Department of Transportation to stop the development of a full interchange at Diamond Hill Road and Rt. 78. Former Mayor Addario and I have been involved in this project since 1996. In May of that year the Township of Berkeley Heights passed a resolution agreeing to a full interchange at Diamond Hill as Watchung agreed to a "Jurisdictional Agreement for the Maintenance of a portion of Plainfield Avenue in the Borough of Watchung, Somerset County, New Jersey." On the 1<sup>st</sup> day of July 1996, the Board of Chosen Freeholders of the County of Union signed the Jurisdictional Agreement. Following this agreement, meetings and plans began. Fast forward to this year after hundreds of hours of meetings, preliminary drawings, traffic studies and the expense of 5 million dollars, the design is complete and the project is funded and ready to go to bid. At the 11<sup>th</sup> hour, Berkeley Heights passes a resolution no to go forward with the plans and held a meeting with the DOT to which we were not invited. The North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority which controls the project asked the DOT for another traffic study and that result has stopped the project. We have obtained a copy of the study and will review it with our engineer and Somerset County. I have also put in an OPRA request for the RFP for the study and a copy of the contract. We have passed a resolution declaring the Jurisdictional Agreement is deemed null and void and the traffic signal at the intersection of Plainfield Avenue and Stony Hill /Drift Road is there without approval of the Borough of Watchung and should be removed as soon as practical. All of us are stakeholders in this project and as you have done in the past, I will be asking for your help as we continue to press forward with this project. Stay tuned.*

*All that happens in this Borough depends on our well educated, enthusiastic, user friendly staff. That is exactly what we have and I appreciate all of their efforts.*

*I am proud to be your Mayor and Fran and I wish you all a very healthy and prosperous New Year.*

## **COUNCIL COMMENTS**

Councilman Franklin wished all a happy New Year from him and his wife Lynn, and thanked his colleagues for the nomination as Council President. He thanked the competent employees and the many volunteers who serve on committees and commissions, as they reflect the pulse of the Borough. He reflected on some of the police highlights throughout the year and invited all to attend the swearing-in ceremony for our new Police Chief, Sean Whelan, on January 9<sup>th</sup> to be held at the Watchung Hills Regional High School Performing Arts Theater. Councilman Franklin said that also on that night, police promotions will be made.

Councilman Black thanked everyone for coming today, and thanked CFO William Hance and Assistant Treasurer Paula Heilman for their assistance throughout the year while he chaired the Finance Committee. He also thanked all the employees and volunteers for their hard work and dedication throughout the year and wished everyone a happy New Year.

Councilman Mobus thanked all involved for the special resolution he received today and said he was honored to be among this group of men. He extended thanks to his wife and all of the wives who have sacrificed family time while their husbands were out fighting fires and saving lives. He said he was happy to be able to chair the Public Works Committee again and thanked the Borough employees for their help throughout the year, especially Carolyn Taylor. He thanked MaryAnn Hance for her assistance and said Charles Gunther did an outstanding job this year. He highlighted some of the projects that were completed this year, giving "kudos" to Engineer Tom Herits. He said he was happy to be able to say that 36 families were able to "hook-up" due to the completion of the big sanitary sewer project on the Sunbright/Corey section, and another 35 families will be able to "hook-up" after the Skyline/Johnston Drive is completed this year. He apologized to residents for the inconvenience while more than 8 miles of overlay was completed, with the assistance of the Morris County Co-op. Councilman Mobus said happy New Year to all, and that he is looking forward to another good year.

Councilwoman Joren, said she was sad after just having to put her daughter on a plane to England to study abroad, thanked everyone for coming today and thanked all of the residents for placing trust in her to do the best job for the Borough. She also thanked the staff and volunteers.

Councilman Pote wished all a happy and healthy New Year and said he was grateful to be re-elected. He thanked the many residents who opened their homes to him and Councilman Nehls during their campaign. In regard to the Library, he advised everyone to watch the progress this year as the Library Study Committee, made up of a strong group of residents with a strong commitment, continue the necessary steps needed to pursue the vision of a new library, not only as a library but as a center for excellence where people of all ages can learn. Councilman Pote thanked the Rescue Squad for responding to 436 calls in 2007. In regard to extrication, he said after 19 years the "baton" has been passed to the Fire Department, adding that he was very proud of the more than 200 calls that had been responded to by the squad and dozens of lives saved during those years. He said to the Fire Department that we are behind you 100% and thanked the Rescue Squad for the donation of "truck 8-0". He thanked the members of the Historical Committee for their many hours of service and said they are very excited with the anticipation of a new home.

Councilman Nehls wished all a happy and healthy New Year from him and his family, and thanked the residents of Watchung for electing him for the next three years, promising to work diligently. He thanked all of the committees and commissions for their hard work, and thanked his wife Georgia and their daughters for being so understanding. He said he looks forward to working again with the Borough staff.

## **PUBLIC PORTION**

Paul Ost, firefighter and resident of Maple Street, thanked all who were involved in making the special legislative resolutions and today's presentation possible. He explained that the idea was to honor these men while they are still here to enjoy it. He spoke about the many hours and sacrifices made by these men, and said they put their lives on the line whenever there is a call. He pointed out that all of the wives have not only sacrificed family time but have also volunteered many hours as members of the auxiliary. Mr. Ost recognized many families in the Borough such as the Mobus', the Blackadars, and the Titus' whose membership has been a family tradition which is still being passed down to their sons and daughters. He said he is very proud to be a member of the fire department and a resident of Watchung.

Diddy Addario, Rock Avenue, on behalf of the Historical Committee, said they are very excited about the promise of their new home, as they will finally have a place to keep the Borough's artifacts.

Max Weber, Maple Street, thanked the governing body for what they do for the residents, noting that they are also volunteers who sacrifice family time.

## **BENEDICTION -**

A Benediction was given by Father Brian Nolan, of St. Mary's.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business to come before the Council, the meeting was adjourned at 1:20 P.M. to the next meeting originally scheduled for January 10, 2008 at 7:30 P.M., now changed to January 9, 2008 to begin at 7:00 P.M. Mayor Ellis explained that the next regular Council meeting will be held at the Watchung Hills Regional High School Performing Arts Center in order to accommodate the ceremony for the swearing in of our new Police Chief, Sean Whelan.

Respectfully submitted:

Michelle L. DeRocco, RMC  
Deputy Clerk