

Ortley Beach Voters and Taxpayers Association
Association Meeting
April 18, 2020
Via Zoom

First association meeting of 2020. Conducted via Zoom (first time) because of the Covid-19 pandemic and mandated social distancing policies.

Called to order at 9:36 a.m.

Reflection: Anthony Colucci

Thanks to all the people on the front lines in fighting the virus: police, EMS, hospital workers, doctors, nurses, supermarket workers and all the others “who deserve our respect and patience.” Moment of silence for all those who have died.

Present: Anthony Colucci, Paul Jeffrey, Cathy Crisafulli, Joe Cantalupo, Joan Strathern, Toni Tomarazzo, Mary Ann Giordano Wallis. Board quorum established.

Membership attendance: 70 online at start of meeting, up to 83 at peak

Minutes of the November 2019 Association meeting accepted. (Anthony, Joan)

Anthony invited members to share with us, via chat message through Zoom or email or phone after the meeting, what is on their minds re: the OBVTA, Toms River and Ortley Beach.

Treasurer and Membership reports: Anthony (interim treasurer)

Anthony said the OBVTA is still looking for someone to fill the treasurer position, now that Kathy Barisciano has left the board and moved out of Ortley Beach. He said it only requires about 30 minutes a month to produce the report, and it’s not difficult. One member, Debbie Barton, later alerted Paul that she was interested in hearing more about the position. Michele Bucci sent a note via Chat that she is willing to help with membership.

Anthony said the biggest expense so far in 2020 was the \$2,000 deposit for the mediator in the Surf Club case (out of \$10,000 approved by the association to spend on mediation).

At March 31, the association had \$64,496 cash on hand. (Income from membership renewals and other expenses left the balance down \$516 from Jan. 1.)

Treasurer and Membership reports approved. (Joe, Paul)

Anthony also presented the 2020 association budget for membership approval. The budget was put together before the pandemic, and will now require some revisions because of changed expenses for meeting, events, etc.

He said the \$10,000 allocated for advocacy likely will not change. However, the board voted to cancel Beach Jam this year, deeming it the most prudent course because of public health concerns, overall uncertainty, difficulty securing sponsors, and the amount of work and money that must be expended now that could go to waste should we have to cancel at the last minute.

2020 Budget approved (Joe, Joan) via roll call vote. 7 - 0.

Member John Clarke asked whether the full membership would have to vote publicly to approve the budget, to adhere to procedures. Anthony said there are limitations to Zoom, and urged members to message via chat now or send an email. Toni noted that the votes must be taken during the meeting. She also noted that many organizations are grappling with these issues. She said the OBVTA needs to amend its by-laws to accommodate technology and other changing circumstances, and invited members to volunteer to help. John Clarke said he would be happy to get involved with updating the by-laws (and later said he would consider becoming a board member).

Guests:

Council member Maria Maruca:

Ms. Maruca invited members to submit their questions to Paul via chat. She thanked the OBVTA for holding this meeting through this format, and said she had invited Mayor Hill and Administrator Don Guardian to join in. Sgt. Bachonski of the TRPD was expected to call in later.

Ms. Maruca said the pandemic is “like Sandy on steroids,” but the town continues to function to protect residents and the community. She said there are a lot of essential personnel still working, including the council, which is live streaming its meetings (2nd and 4th Tuesdays of every month) via YouTube. (Link to live meetings, as well as archived videos and minutes of past meetings, is available at <https://www.tomsrivertownship.com/>.) She said the planning and zoning boards are about to start online streaming of meetings, as well.

Don Guardian said the town takes in about \$800,000 a month in income (ice rink, golf, courts, permits, etc.), which has been interrupted. He said a number of nonessential personnel have been given 4-8 week furloughs. Some 200 employees, the mayor and the council are forgoing salaries. The town determined that with stimulus and unemployment benefits, and the town’s continuation of their health insurance, there would be little negative impact to those employees. All municipal buildings are closed except to essential personnel. Big picture: If we are not open by June, the town will have to look at its finances again.

Mayor Hill said this is a difficult time for many, including those who are unemployed and newly experiencing food insecurity, so the town is working with Fulfill (food bank), churches and others to distribute food. There will be food given out every Friday between 11 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. at several locations across Toms River and in Ortley Beach at the 3rd Ave beach parking lot. Up to date details can be found on the Toms River website:

<https://www.tomsrivertownship.com/>

Schools are delivering breakfast and lunch foods for students at (closed) schools every Monday.

Those who need home deliveries should contact the Township via Stacy Proebstle (732-341-1000 Ext 8234) or by email at sproebstle@tomsrivertownship.com. Mayor Hill said the town was able to save time and money by obtaining a sanitizing mister from Ocean County for police, EMS, public works, buildings and grounds vehicles.

Surf Club: Ms. Maruca said the town has had one mediation session with the Barcellona family (owners of the three Surf Club properties being sought by Toms River, with Green/Blue Acres, Toms River and other monies), organized by the OBVTA-paid mediator. She said she is limited legally in what she can report but will pass along more information once she is able. She said the mediation is still alive but suspended since the social distancing restrictions went in place.

Boardwalk: She said it will reopen once the town gets the OK from the governor. Schools are closed until at least May 15. Reopenings will probably be rolled out gradually, she said.

Kayak ramp: The town council on Tuesday voted to authorize expansion of the Ortley kayak ramp with two more racks (12 more spots), bringing the total of kayak spaces to 30. She said the racks would be moved to open up two parking spaces.

Budget: Ms. Maruca said the town has been closely working with Congressman Andy Kim to petition FEMA to forgive a \$5 million loan to the township for Sandy expenses. She said Brick town, Lavallette, Point Pleasant borough, Mantoloking and Berkeley have had their loans fully or partially forgiven. Congressman Kim continues to advocate in the hope that FEMA will come to its senses, she said.

Toms River municipal budget: Hearings continue. The next is April 28. Even now the budget is being amended based on expenses and losses due to Covid-19. Mr. Guardian said the tax increase will amount to 1.68%, or \$116, on a property assessed at \$275,000. (More details about the town's expenses and the anticipated tax increases can be found in this [Asbury Park Press article](#).) The budget now includes a \$1.5 million payment toward the FEMA payback; \$800,000 income loss due to the virus; an extra payroll period because of calendar adjustments costing \$650,000; and an increase because of a court decision that dramatically reduced the tax assessment for the BASF property.

Don Guardian said municipalities are waiting to see if the next Congressional aid package will include local aid (including that \$5 million FEMA loan forgiveness). Every state and local government is trying to get help from the federal government, he said.

Don Guardian was asked if the percentage increase of taxes for Ortley Beach residents is the same as that for the rest of Toms River. He said yes, but promised to analyze the issue on Monday and get back to us.

Toni asked if the membership could help with the FEMA appeal by writing to Andy Kim. Ms. Maruca welcomed and encouraged the help.

Toni asked Mr. Guardian if Toms River has any insight into potential school and county tax increases. Don said the Toms River municipal portion has usually comprised 30% of property tax bills; 50% is schools and 20% is Ocean County. He said given the state cuts to the schools, it's not illogical to assume that some of the costs will be passed on to taxpayers. He said the Board of Education might consider furloughing some nonessential personnel now that schools are closed, but he has seen no indication that is happening.

Mayor Hill said the entire tax and aid situation is extremely fluid. Because of the uncertainties, the town has instituted a hiring freeze and reduced confidential employees by 16%, resulting in \$500,000 in savings. Outsourcing the law department is also expected to save several hundred thousand dollars, he said, based on what he has been told by other towns who have done so. Anthony asked if the confidential employees are all going to be brought back, or would that happen on a case by case basis. Mayor Hill said some have retired and will not be replaced. Ms. Maruca said some positions have been consolidated; 3 council and clerk's staff members have been furloughed; and clerks are covering (and protecting themselves) by working in shifts. The legal department will be outsourced. Toni asked if the contracted attorneys will be paid a flat fee or hourly. Mayor Hill said he believes hourly. Toms River will draw from a pool of local attorneys who are grouped by expertise and will be hired as needed.

A member asked about tax extensions. Ms. Maruca said it is set by statute, but the legal department is looking into it. She said there are limitations because of impact on financial institutions re: mortgages, foreclosures, etc., and that there could be grounds for legal action against the town. Asked if tax bills will be delayed because the budget is delayed, she said no. Banks will automatically be making tax payments for mortgaged properties on May 1.

Cathy Crisafulli later asked the status of the tax re-assessments. Mayor Hill said the process has been delayed for at least a year, per the county.

A member asked about reopening the **beaches**: Mayor Hill said they would be reopened when the other towns open theirs. Sgt. Bachonski, who joined the meeting, said the goal is safety first.

Joan Strathern asked about the status of the **Streetscape** project for Ortleigh Beach. Mayor Hill said that the town planner, Dave Roberts, who is spearheading the project (which received \$1 million in funding from the state) has been juggling a lot, including having the planning board hearings go live, which raises access issues re: legal representation, testimony, etc. He said he would get more information.

Question about **summer rentals**: Can owners get a Certificate of Occupancy for rentals? Don Guardian said the town handled about 800 rental properties last summer, just on the island. He said the C of O process is continuing and that code enforcement is still working, including making inspections (lesson learned from Sandy). He said owners can't rent yet, per the state, and that the town will extend the coverage period for C of Os by the number of months rentals are held up by the state.

Cathy Crisafulli asked about the street elevation project for **Sixth Terrace**. Ms. Maruca said it is considered an essential project and has not been delayed. She said all paving and essential transportation projects are still ongoing and that the only things the town is now pulling back on are those affected by executive orders from the governor.

Sgt. Gene Bachonski:

Sgt. Bachonski said that the Toms River Police Department is taking all precautions, including eliminating roll call (signing in instead); using PPE (plentiful); decontaminating vehicles; and limiting contact with the public except for emergencies. Non-emergencies are being assessed by dispatchers and assigned on a case by case basis.

In line with the governor's executive orders, the TRPD is encouraging people to stay off the roads, except for essential travel, but there is no ban; the PD can't legally stop anyone. He said people can walk, visit family, go out to get food or medicine. The PD can't kick people out of living in or visiting their secondary homes, though the governor has discouraged the practice. Ice cream trucks are permitted. And ongoing construction projects can continue, with five workers or less, as well as landscaping.

He said the TRPD can enforce the wearing of masks in businesses and on public transportation; gatherings of 10 or more people (he said they are getting a lot of calls about this and going out on a case by case basis); beach and park closures (this is considered trespassing). Boats are OK, he said. Detectives are handling complaints of price gouging.

He said the town is not seeing increases in crime and most people are staying home. But now that pawn shops are allowed to reopen, the TRPD is expecting more thefts, he said. The town has not seen an increase of released prisoners because of Covid concerns. They anticipate more reports of scams, particularly surrounding the stimulus checks. He reminded members that the IRS will never call, email or use social media to reach you, and urged people to NOT click on links if they are not sure of the source.

Drivers licenses and car registrations are extended two months, per the state. Ms. Maruca said the DMV will be reassessing its closed offices this week. Anthony asked about the new licenses required for travel. Ms. Maruca said the requirement for them is extended to October 2021.

Joan asked about how the community medical center is holding up. Mayor Hill said he sees the numbers every day and they have enough ventilators and beds. He has a weekly call with the hospital president. He said he believes we will come out of this understanding who is important in our society and thanked those serving for putting their health at risk to fight the pandemic.

Joe Cantalupo later congratulated Sgt. Bachonski for passing the lieutenants test and rising to N. 1 on the list, and wished him luck getting the promotion.

Mayor Hill and Don Guardian left the meeting.

OBVTA Updates:

Covid-19: Ms. Maruca and Anthony both urged people to contact them if they have needs or concerns. Those who need food should let Maria know. Information about the food drives is on the OBVTA website. Anthony said the OBVTA will get people the help they need and is open to hearing about any concerns or ideas. He echoed Mayor Hill and Ms. Maruca in saying the community needs to work together and stand up for each other.

Board of Directors Nominations: Anthony said all officers serve on a two-year cycle. This year the positions held by the vice president, secretary and three at-large members are up for election. (A volunteer for the Treasurer position would be voted on by the board and named to complete the term begun by Kathy Barisciano.)

The OBVTA uses a self-nomination process. He said the board is always looking for new people and new ideas, and urged members to step up. (Member John Clarke said he would be interested.) The process calls for nominees to come forward in April; be announced in May; and voted on by members in June. Anthony said it's important to have strength in numbers, but it's also important for the town officials to see new faces so they know we are vibrant.

Paul again solicited questions from members via Zoom chat or email.

Membership system: Paul said besides Kathy Barisciano (treasurer), the association has also lost Steve Sherrill, who resigned as membership chairman. Paul has largely taken over his duties. The board is now considering a digital membership and event system; Paul has been investigating options. Meanwhile, PayPal is not working right now for those who want to pay dues, but Paul said he will get it fixed because in these days of contamination fears, he prefers that people pay electronically rather than by check. He said we do not use Venmo or other automatic payment systems.

A member said the **Moose Lodge** has been in financial straits because of the social distancing policies. Anthony said the board would discuss making a contribution.

A member said canceling Beach Jam is understandable, but can we at least have the **fireworks**? Paul said our sponsors are financially stressed right now, but that we would reassess the situation over the coming months, and perhaps we could have a smaller event in late summer or fall.

A member noted that there are **discarded masks and gloves** all over the streets. Anthony said he will bring it to Don Guardian's attention and ask for the street sweeper to come by, particularly around Acme.

Debbie Martin said her employer, the Ocean County Board of Social Services, is offering **services** and other help for those who need it. She said anyone can call or use www.njhelps.org to contact them and he/she will get a call back advising eligibility for services (she urged people to unblock their phones so they can get the calls back).

Ms. Martin also advised more residents to go to the Toms River council meetings. Anthony said the town meetings are now being held via YouTube, and viewers have an opportunity to send in questions to be addressed at that meeting.

Paul said he would leave the Zoom chat open if there are more questions; he noted there was a lot of good information provided by officials today to share. Mary Ann said she would do the minutes quickly so this information gets to members right away. Joan advised members they can also email, call, etc., to bring their concerns/needs/ideas to the board's attention.

Motion to close approved. Meeting ended at 11:15 a.m.