

Ortley Beach Voters and Taxpayers Association
Monthly Membership Meeting
May 16, 2020, 9:30 a.m.
Via Zoom

Called to order at 9:32 a.m.

Present: Anthony Colucci, Paul Jeffrey, Cathy Crisafulli, Joe Cantalupo, Joan Strathern, Toni Tomarazzo, Mary Ann Giordano Wallis, Debbie Barton, Mike Wymbbs. All board members present.

Membership attendance: 83 online at start of meeting, 109 at peak.

Minutes of the April 2020 Association meeting. Motion to accept. (Joan, Cathy) All accepted, none opposed.

Treasurer and Membership reports: Debbie Barton

Anthony introduced Debbie Barton as the new OBVTA treasurer. He cited her extensive experience in accounting, auditing, federal bank examination and working with nonprofit organizations, and thanked her for volunteering to sit on the board and take on that role.

Expenses in April were minimal. Besides \$254 for web and email services, the board made a \$200 donation to Fulfill to help provide food during the current pandemic crisis and widespread unemployment. (A check written to support the Moose Lodge was not yet cashed.) The cash balance as of April 30: \$65,030.

Membership: 167 memberships have been renewed so far this year, leaving us behind by about 25% from prior years. Paul Jeffrey pointed out that the dues collections were impeded by the fact that we are not holding physical meetings and are not able to collect dues at check-in desk.

Motion to accept the Treasurer and Membership reports. (Paul, Joan) All accepted, none opposed.

Guest Speakers:

Kim Guadagno, president and CEO of Fulfill

Mary Ann introduced Ms. Guadagno: Former Assistant U.S. Attorney in NY and NJ; former NJ Assistant Attorney General; former NJ Secretary of State; former Lt. Gov.; 2017 Republican nominee for governor. She is now president and CEO of Fulfill, formerly the Food Banks of Monmouth and Ocean County.

Also on the Zoom call was Linda Kellner, Fulfill's director of development, who Ms. Guadagno said was with NJ Gas for 30 years and comes from a family that has lived in Ocean County for 3 generations.

Ms. Guadagno said Fulfill has two facilities: the larger one is in Neptune, the second is in a row of similar services on Hooper Ave: People's Pantry, which Fulfill now manages; JBJ Soul Kitchen; and a culinary school that trains people on feeding large groups.

She said in the last 63 days, life changed significantly, and the organization developed a COVID-19 focus. With 1 in 5 people in Ocean and Monmouth counties now unemployed, they are seeing a 40% increase in need in the last 60 days. The demand is so great that people can no longer shop in People's Pantry. Instead, Fulfill puts together Crisis Boxes, with four days of food for a family of four: cereal, canned

goods, four lunches, mac & cheese, black beans & rice, staple milk & juice. In Neptune, they have given out 32,000 Crisis Boxes. Fulfill also works to help support restaurants by paying \$5/meal; 98,000 of those meals were given out in the last 60 days.

In Toms River, 660 crisis boxes were distributed last Friday at five sites, including in the Ortlely 3rd Avenue parking lot, and another 150 distributed at the Y. The weekly distributions were set up after Guadagno met with Mayor Mo Hill and the City Council. Mayor Hill, Council President Maruca, Councilman Turnbach and Administrator Don Guardian, among other city officials, all participate in packing and distributing boxes.

Ms. Guadagno said there is no apparent end to this; the need is worse than after Sandy and will last longer than after Sandy: NJ has the highest rate of Covid and the highest death rate in the country. She said Fulfill continues to gear up to serve everyone who needs to be fed, many of whom have never been in this situation before, and many have a difficult time seeking and accepting help. She urged everyone to reach out and help their neighbors.

Members asked about volunteering. Ms. Guadagno said they have very active volunteers. Fulfill takes all precautions for their safety, including having a nurse on staff who takes temperatures. They also wipe everything down every hour and mandate breaks.

Fulfill accepts food donations, needed more than ever as it is getting more difficult to find large amounts of food and to get trailers to come to them. Food drives are appreciated. Fulfill works closely with Feeding America, a national umbrella group that addresses food insecurity. Money donations are a big help; for every dollar donated, they can create three meals. Having money on hand also allows them to buy a truckload of food once it becomes available.

Go to the website to find out how to volunteer: <https://fulfillnj.org/> Ms. Guadagno also gave her cellphone number: 605-575-8111. Anthony said we would include contact information for Fulfill in OBVTA emails and post it on the OBVTA website, and he urged members to support Fulfill.

Council President Maria Maruca:

With Mayor Mo Hill, Administrator Don Guardian and TR CFO Alex Davidson

Ms. Maruca underscored the job that Fulfill is doing and urged support.

She said the township is in Phase 1 of its beach reopening plan. That plan involves opening entrances at 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 7th, 8th, Fielder and Harding.

Discounted seasonal badges (\$35) will go on sale on Monday at the recreation center, 1810 Warren Point Rd, Toms River. They will be sold at the boardwalk lifeguard stations on weekends as well, starting this weekend. The town will stop sales of discount badges on June 19, the eve of when the beach will be fully opened and staffed with lifeguards, checkers, etc. The price of a seasonal pass will go up to \$50 on that day, June 20th. She said bike racks have been added, and this week mobie mats will be added at the 3rd and 4th Ave. and Fielder and Harding entrances. Benches will be added to the cutouts at the top of the beach walkways. (Don Guardian later said 20 benches will be placed starting this week, and for those that have been donated, plaques will be added later.) She said everything is changing and that the beaches could still be shut down by Gov. Murphy at any point.

The kayak ramp has been expanded further, from 12 to 18 to 30 storage spots. Permits for the additional spots are on sale on Monday.

Mayor Hill said his term as mayor, which started in January, had already involved a tornado and a pandemic. He has been closely following Covid-19's impact on Toms River through Office of Emergency Management reports and police reports. He said the hospitals were never at capacity for ICU beds or ventilators; the number of hospitalizations has gone down from 160 to 60; and the hospital is opening for elective procedures.

He said Toms River saw 660 active cases, 160 of which were in nursing homes, and at 380 addresses. Eighty percent of the infected were 65 and older. There were 91 fatalities, which represents .09% of the population. Overall, of the 40,000 housing units, .7% were affected by Covid-19. And active cases are dropping. (The state reported 1392 cases, 112 fatalities in TR as of May 20.)

Beach opening: He said he has a call every Tuesday with other barrier island mayors. They all concurred to open the beaches and will continue discussions about further measures. On Monday, parks will open, construction will be allowed to resume and City Hall will open (with safety measures like shields, limited entry and mask and glove requirements). On May 28th, furloughed employees will be coming back to Toms River. He said the town is requesting that the governor allow small businesses to reopen.

Don Guardian said, besides adding mobile mats, signs and benches, the town would begin the process of accepting bids to build pickle ball courts on the so-called shell parking lot (site of the old EMT center) on 35 South. He hopes they will be ready by spring 2021. Town hall will open on Monday, but there will be no summer camps, ice skating or playgrounds this summer. He said the governor will announce the standards for pools this week. As for the beach, he said everyone, including the lifeguards, are responsible for encouraging social distancing. As such, contact sports or any ball or other play that puts people closer than 6 feet apart are not allowed.

Mr. Guardian said Atlantic City never closed its beaches and that people there are practicing social distancing. He said the town engineers estimated that Ortley's beach could accommodate 15,600 people and that last year only 11,000 badges were sold. He said signs suggesting social distancing have been placed at beach entrances and that the bathrooms, which will be opened, will be disinfected and fogged after each use.

A discussion about reopening the beach commenced, based on questions submitted to the OBVTA and read by Paul Jeffrey. Residents expressed concern that no restrictions have been put on beach or parking capacity or badge sales; enforcement of social distancing and other rules is vague; and many fear that the township is underestimating the crowds that will gather and the threats to the health of the residents of Ortley Beach.

Mayor Hill said Class 1 police officers will be on quads on the beach making sure people keep to the social distancing guidelines. There will be only one lifeguard per stand, but lifeguards would also reinforce the need to social distance, etc. (It was pointed out that in the past residents were told that lifeguards are not responsible for anything other than watching swimmers and rescues.) He said he believed people were shaken up by the epidemic and that they would follow guidelines: ie, he said he expected residents to park, wear their masks until they got to their chosen spot on the beach – separated from others by the suggested six feet – and would only then take off masks. He said they

would do the same as they left the beach. He added that the governor's office provided very little guidance as it lifted the restrictions on beaches.

Sgt. Walter Bachonski, who joined the call, later acknowledged that the town was facing a shortage of Class 1 officers because the police academy session where this summer's group would have been trained was canceled due to COVID-19. He said the Class 1s usually work in pairs, and that he is trying to play with the numbers to make it work so that Ortleigh gets better coverage.

Members, via Zoom chat, suggested that the township limit daily and weekly passes to control crowds; that it limit parking to 50% as Seaside does, or limit parking close to the beach, as Point Pleasant is doing by restricting non-residents to parking west of Rt 35 and allowing only people with resident stickers east of Rt. 35. Members also suggested that the town offer mail order or other contactless means of buying beach badges, and hand out masks and remind people to wear them as people come up 3rd Avenue to enter the public lot. They asked if lifeguards would be tested and if they would wear masks. (Mr. Guardian said they would wear masks and that, with access to testing expanding via Rite Aid on Mule Road, there is greater opportunity to test lifeguards.) Board member Mike Wymbys suggested that the town reinstall a PA system, which existed before Sandy, to issue reminders about safe practices to beachgoers; the town officials said they would follow up. Several members posted via Zoom chat that they do NOT want the speaker system back; that it was obnoxious; and that lifeguards could do the communications.

Ms. Maruca said badge checkers will be given more responsibility but also more breaks, hand wipes and other forms of relief. Mr. Guardian said the town learned a lot about sanitizing and maintaining healthy practices, particularly involving bathrooms, with the partial reopening of the town golf course two weeks ago. He said expectations were to generally sanitize the bathrooms, railings, etc.

Joan Strathern said it seems as if the town is relying on people "doing the right thing." Mr. Guardian said 11 signs with guidelines have been placed, lifeguards are "the first line of defense," and additional law enforcement will be provided. Mayor Hill promised more extensive monitoring of beaches. "Hopefully they will be smart." He said it is impossible to monitor everyone and that "we'll do the best we can."

Ms. Maruca said that the town will be monitoring sales of beach badges. She said while sale of seasonal badges was not being restricted, "we will keep an eye on the daily badges." She pointed out that there is no charge for the beach until June 20th.

She also said there is opportunity through the OBVTA membership to get the word out to guests and renters re: expectations. She suggested that real estate agents disseminate a pamphlet, which the town will prepare, explaining beach guidelines, and the CDC guidelines. She suggested the pamphlet be downloadable, as well, and available at counters of businesses. Further, she said the pamphlet an CDC guidelines could be mailed by the town to anyone who sought a C of O to rent this summer. Anthony said that was a good idea and the authority of the township would reinforce behavioral expectations.

Mayor Hill pointed out that the state has lifted the ban on short-term rentals but that it has yet to put out guidelines for sanitizing rental units. He said some owners have said they would require that renters bring their own towels and bedding. Mayor Hill said "things are still fluid" and more information would be forthcoming. Don Guardian said information coming out from the Office of Emergency Management would be used to create guidelines that will be mailed to everyone who has a C of O for rentals.

Asked about rentals, he said the town is hearing that the split is 50-50: half want their money back.

Asked about condo associations, where renters pose a greater threat because of closer quarters, and there is uncertainty about opening pools, he said the town is waiting for guidance by the governor, state health department and CDC.

Mayor Hill promised better police patrols at Acme, starting Memorial Day weekend, in response to members' concerns that there were long lines already. He said the ShopRite on Fischer Blvd. already has increased patrols. Mr. Guardian said the town has had problems with teens and young adults congregating at the WaWa in Chadwick Beach and that the WaWa has contracted for Toms River police officers; Ms. Maruca suggested Acme consider doing the same.

Anthony invited members to send the OBVTA questions which directors will try to get answered from the town.

Joan asked **Sgt. Bachonski** what residents should do if they see people violating safety precautions. He said residents should only call 911 in emergencies, and instead call the main Toms River PD phone number, where a dispatcher will take the call and assign the appropriate response. That number is 732-349-0150. He said the first point of contact should be badge checkers or lifeguards, but that police can and will respond if the issue warrants. He noted, though, that the government order re: masks, etc., only says the state "strongly encourages" people to wear them, and that police can only cajole people into complying, not ticket or arrest.

Sgt. Bachonski said he was asked by the Detective Bureau to warn members about scams, many related to the IRS and federal stimulus money. He said scammers particularly prey on the elderly. He said if you don't know if a call is a scam, take the information from the caller and offer to call back.

Board Member Joe Cantalupo later asked if the town had considered enlisting personnel from the county sheriff's department, as they do in Florida. Ms. Maruca said the town could have the chief inquire but that everyone is strapped for personnel.

Alex Davidson, the Toms River CFO, was asked to provide an overview of the reasons behind the town's 5.8% tax increase, which he said comes to about \$102 a year for the average homeowner in Ortley. He said:

- The town has not increased taxes in three years while expenses have gone up.
- FEMA is insisting that the town pay back a \$5 million loan made after Sandy for economic recovery; ¼ of that or \$1.25 million was built into expenses this year as the town, with the help of the OBVTA and federal officials, continues to fight to have the loan forgiven.
- Because it's a leap year, the biweekly pay schedule for municipal workers requires an extra pay period.
- The cost of COVID-19 response.
- The failure of the ice rink and golf course to self-sustain their portion of their budgets – operating expenses – with dues because they were closed in the epidemic shut-down.
- Labor negotiations are coming up.
- The town has ordered an efficiency study to cut costs and with tucks and furloughs managed to keep the tax increase to 3.7 cents, instead of an anticipated 4.2 cents, per \$1,000 assessed value.

He said budget-wise this year, “it was almost like a perfect storm.”

Paul Jeffrey said the OBVTA has been trying to assist in fighting FEMA on its so-called clawbacks, and that we have reached out to Congressman Andy Kim and Senator Bob Menendez, who are supporting bills blocking FEMA from collecting. Copies of the letter are available on the OBVTA web site, and he urged homeowners who haven’t done so already to download or write their own to push government officials to get this done. Asked why other towns had their loans forgiven, and not Toms River, Mr. Davidson said it is because the metrics that were used did not show Toms River having a deficit for five years after the storm – a requirement for loan conversion.

Board of Director Nominations:

Mary Ann read the list of positions up for election next month: Vice President Paul Jeffrey, Secretary Mary Ann Giordano Wallis and three at-large board positions held by Cathy Crisafulli, Joan Strathern and Toni Tomarazzo. The board has already received a self nomination from John Clarke, an attorney, for one of those seats.

Anthony said more nominations would be taken until the end of the meeting and members will vote to fill the five positions at the June membership meeting.

By the end of the meeting, there was another nomination for one of the three at-large seats: Gail D’Amico (nominated by Pete Conrad, seconded by Steve Sherrill).

Motion to close the nominations (Joan, Joe) was approved.

Surf Club Mediation:

Board member Toni Tomarazzo said the Surf Club is a lingering casualty of Sandy. She said the membership knows that the OBVTA has hired a mediator to try to bridge the gap between Toms River and the Barcellona family, owners of the Surf Club, over how much money the town will add to the Green Acres/Blue Acres funds awarded by the state. Toni said she knows that town officials cannot say too much about ongoing negotiations, but asked for a general response re: how things are going.

Mayor Hill said the matter was discussed in Executive Session on Tuesday, after the council meeting. He said the town is moving forward with the mediation and is optimistic that we are going to get to a deal.

Ms. Maruca said she could not provide details of what was discussed in the executive session but that “we’re moving forward with it on our end, in good faith.”

Toni praised Toms River for agreeing to participate in the mediation process. But she pointed out, again, that this is a once in a lifetime opportunity and that extraordinary circumstances have made this land available. She said she wanted to remind the town that there are a plethora of ways that a deal could be made, and encouraged the town to use all the tools at its disposal. She said she appreciates the town moving forward and the entire community is behind this purchase. She asked the officials to acknowledge the importance that a deal be made.

Ms. Maruca acknowledged that it is a once in a lifetime opportunity and that the purchase would complete our ocean front. She said she is supportive of moving forward with this but that it is in negotiations. She promised the town would act in good faith to move the project forward.

Comments from Board Members:

A member asked if town council meetings would be opened to the public soon. Mayor Hill said the ban on groups of more than 10 people is still in effect and that there are 10 town officials alone. He said the meetings would be continued online for now. Ms. Maruca said the council is working with the town's I.T. department to see if the meetings could move from YouTube to another platform like Zoom.

Another member asked if the tennis courts are open. Mayor Hill said they are, but playgrounds are still closed.

Anthony reiterated that members who have additional questions could send them to OBVTA and we will present them to town officials and come back with answers.

A motion to adjourn was made (Joe, Mary Ann) and approved. The meeting was adjourned at 11:44 a.m.

#####