

Ortley Beach Voters and Taxpayers Association
Monthly Meeting
Saturday, Aug. 8, 2020, 9:30 a.m.
Via Zoom

Membership meeting called to order at 9:32 a.m. (Anthony Colucci)

Moment of reflection and silence for the 160,107 Americans who have died from COVID-19 and the front-line workers; plea to be courteous to front-line workers (Anthony Colucci)

Present: Anthony Colucci, Paul Jeffrey, Cathy Crisafulli, Joe Cantalupo, Toni Tomarazzo, Mary Ann Giordano Wallis, Debbie Barton, Mike Wymbbs.

Membership attendance: 40 households online initially. 55 at peak. Quorum established.

Paul Jeffrey reminded members they could put their questions in the Zoom chat.

Minutes of the July 2020 Association meeting. Motion to accept. (Debbie, Paul). Accepted.

Treasurer and Membership reports: Debbie Barton

Revenue YTD \$8,124. Well behind budget and in membership, but no expenditures for Beach Jam and meetings at Moose.

Expenses for the month included payment for a gift basket for Don Guardian; payments to attorney Michelle Donato; payment to planner re: zoning issue; donation to Moose Lodge annual golf outing. Cash on hand as of Aug. 1, 2020: \$62,481.

Anthony: We have revised the budget. Approved budget had anticipated 450 memberships; now lowered to 350 (which is still 74 fewer than current). Memberships are apparently down because we cannot meet in person due to the pandemic. However, the board has revised the membership year, so payments now will cover up to July 1, 2021.

Even with reductions in meeting expenses and cancellation of Beach Jam, \$11,000 budget deficit is anticipated – and that's assuming membership gets to 350 this year.

Anthony said the revised budget does not have to be voted on; it's just there to guide us.

He urged members to renew their membership by going to the website and paying via PayPal or mailing a check.

Treasurer's and Membership reports accepted.

Surf Club Update: Toni Tomarazzo

The Surf Club agreement is still being hashed out legally. The mediator had informed the OBVTA board that there has been “significant progress.” However, it is fragile, so please don’t discuss or ask about it at this meeting to avoid any chance of derailing progress.

Once the deal is finalized, the OBVTA has a wonderful celebration idea in mind. “Continue to keep that champagne on ice because I think we are going to have a chance to pop that cork together.”

Guest Speakers:

Anthony advised members to put their questions in the chat to be relayed by Paul Jeffrey.

Council Speaker Maria Maruca:

Hurricane Isaias caused significant outages. There are still areas of Toms River that don’t have power. She thanked everyone for their patience. JCP&L has not done its best, and the council would be addressing the company’s performance.

Re: the overgrown shrubs on Bay Boulevard, TR has reached out to the county for maintenance.

TR has gone out to bid for the three new pickle ball courts that will be built on Rt. 35 South at the north end of the seashell parking lot. Anthony said we had seen the preliminary plans but had asked to see the final plans before they went out to bid. Have they changed? She said she thinks they are the same, but she will look through her files and try to send the plans she has and will also try to get us access to the bid request.

The township is still maintaining two food distribution sites and food deliveries are available for any Ortley residents who request it.

Beach Access: The town is pursuing a relationship with a group called Beach Days for All to improve access for the disabled and those who would not normally have access to the water. The town hopes to announce something for the summer of 2021. Seaside Park has implemented the group’s plan at F Street, for anyone who wants to see how it works. Also Lavallette obtained a grant for it.

The township just passed an ordinance that would allow businesses to meet zoning requirements in Ortley if they are within 1000 feet of a parking area. The request for the ordinance was made by the OBVTA to help encourage more businesses to populate the downtown area. Anthony noted that the planning board had just approved revisions to the plan for the steakhouse next to Kohr’s, which took into account the new parking ordinance. Anthony also suggested that businesses consider valet parking.

Anthony suggested that TR explore new means of televising its council meetings, as the current system makes it difficult to get a good sense of the meeting and to interact. He said other towns have vibrant video and YouTube channels and suggested that TR invest.

Ms. Maruca asked Acting Business Administrator Lou Amoroso, who was on the Zoom call, to look into it. Mr. Amoroso said the IT department had looked into YouTube and had problems with it, but they can look again. Anthony urged them to look at what other towns are doing. Ms. Maruca said the challenge is integrating with the TR system, but that they would look into.

Question via Paul: What can be done about the flooding in the bay area (aside from 6th Street)? Mr. Amoroso said that there are some problems area that the town is looking at, including in the north beach area. He said they will continue to target Ortle and add street elevations to their live list, but that actually elevating is a long, drawn-out process that requires buy-in from residents. The town has been good about getting grant money from the state DOT. But this is going to be an ongoing process until we get every street to where it needs to be. He said it is a dynamic condition (caused by higher and higher tides). Ms. Maruca said residents who want to see their streets added to the town engineer list should send her an email.

Question via Paul about storm drains and water backups.

Paul noted that the town has tried to deal with this in the past by using rubber flaps to keep the water from flowing back but they became filled with debris. Also, water is not only coming up storm drains, it's also coming up through the land as the bay seeks its own level on the sandbar that is the barrier island. To deal with it requires elevating streets one by one, but it is an ongoing battle.

Mayor Mo Hill said that Paul is correct and that the water table is very high. He said the town is getting DOT grants for every project, which costs the town c. \$400K that is matched by the state. He said it is going to be an ongoing problem and that at some point we might have to circle back and do a second round of elevation.

Question via Paul for Mr. Amoroso about how the state is not maintaining the shoulders on Route 35 North and South, which is a problem every summer.

Mr. Amoroso said he will reach out to the state again. As for the town just doing the work, he said the state does not look kindly on that.

Question about the condition of Don Guardian, who has been ill since spring.

Ms. Maruca said he is improving.

Paul noted that the end wheel of the kayak ramp has been missing and requested it be replaced.

Mr. Amoroso promised to look into it.

Question about when the shredding truck will come around.

Maria said it is a county project, though it is hosted on the public works property. A member noted that the TR shredding was last week and that the next visit is noted on the recycling app calendar.

Question about the new parking ordinance and whether the OBVTA supports it.

Anthony said the ordinance, which allows businesses to fulfill parking requirements if lots are within 1,000 feet, is a real boon to us. He said most of the people in Ortley walk or bike to the beach and businesses but that they are more likely to drive to dinner. He said the ordinance gives businesses more options and that it supports the master plan, which encourages commercial development along Route 35 North to make the strip more family friendly. He reiterated the suggestion for businesses to use valet parking, but Ms. Maruca said it might not be feasible for businesses who have a short season and are hurting now.

Toni said the OBVTA has been pushing for revisions to the parking requirement for years to build up the vibrancy of downtown by creating opportunities for businesses that might not have parking capability. She said restaurants will be active at night so won't be competing with beach parking. She said the OBVTA has been working on creating such business opportunity with an eye toward appropriateness. That is why the OBVTA did not challenge the steakhouse revised application.

Paul noted that with the beach parking and the seashell parking, most of Route 35 North is within 1000 feet of parking.

Mike Wymbbs noted that there is a reluctance to reopen schools for safety reasons and asked what the town is doing to protect people on the beach.

Mayor Hill jumped in, saying he wanted to make his presentation.

Mayor Hill:

He said Tuesday's storm resulted in outages at 42,000 to 49,000 households and that five days later a few thousand were still out. The power was knocked out all over, including at Holiday City and in Greenbriar. He said JCP&L has a critical care list of places that must be first to have power restored but that it has not done so. He said the town is planning an emergency meeting and will request to meet with JCP&L.

COVID-19: He gets data from the community medical center, which reported that 298 patients are now COVID positive. Cases are down in nursing homes and the graph is flat. He said NJ has done a good job but that he is asking the governor to open more up.

Revaluation: A timeline will be posted on the town website. The Ocean County Board of Taxation drives the revaluation process based on a formula. They requested it in 2018. In 2019 the town asked for a one-year extension. In 2020 the tax map was approved. In March the town went out to bid, but opening the bids was delayed because of Covid. In June the office of the attorney general requested that the process move forward. In July new bids were received and on July 28 the contract was awarded to Professional Property Appraisers. The town is awaiting a signed contract and expect the process to start in September. The appraisers will start by measuring the outside of properties, etc., and will come back later to look at interiors. He said the firm has experience doing this in the COVID era and has safety systems in place, including having owners video their interiors. He said the appraisals are due October 2021 and the findings will likely affect the 2022 taxes.

With people anxious to move out of the cities because of COVID, property values have risen about 6%, he said.

Toni advised the township to move with caution when dealing with COVID, as this is a dangerous pandemic and until a vaccine is found, will continue to be. She said Hudson County had strict lockdown rules and had an even greater decline in its infection rate.

Mayor Hill noted that there have been improvements in treatments as well, and that there must be concern for the emotional and financial health of a community, as well as its physical health. We need to balance the numbers, he said.

Toni thanked Mr. Hill for being a mayor who listens and who allows us to express our opinions.

Paul asked about the status of the beach situation during the last few weeks.

Ms. Maruca said the town is selling about 250 daily badges, 400 on weekends. She said Sgt. Bachonski believes the beach staff is being proactive and directing people to less crowded areas of the beach, avoiding incidents.

Question about the status of a suggestion made to put signs on the benches in the beach walkway cutouts, suggesting that seniors get seating priority. Ms. Maruca said she would check on it.

Question about situations where property owners wait until after they get their C of O and then make significant out-of-compliance changes to their homes and lots, including extending paving, putting in ground-floor bathrooms, converting attics to bedrooms. Paul asked how neighbors can complain anonymously, without fear of being identified to the subject of their complaints? Ms. Maruca said she would forward the question to the town law office and Ken Fitzsimmons.

Question about enforcing the closing of permits, as many remain open for years with no work going on. Mayor Hill said developers are required to renew permits and that they are not automatically open forever. He said after Sandy the town started to evaluate permits, but that if they are renewed they can be kept open.

Question from Joe Cantalupo via Anthony: With the badge checkers coming in at 10, how can we restrict beach access as the beach and parking lots are already packed by 10 a.m.?

Ms. Maruca said the town could talk about earlier hours for badge checkers (she would talk to Jared), but that the beach also has spotters who enforce the badge requirement throughout the day.

Question about zoning density violators. Why no summonses or stop orders?

Ms. Maruca said there is a long process that code enforcement has to follow. If they do not have permits, the town can stop work, but if it's a zoning violation, the property owner or developer can delay endlessly.

Sgt. Bachonski:

The chief's secretary, Denise, had recently died at the age of 59 and township officials had attended a wake, and he had seen them there.

The summer is going great and the officers on duty on the beach are doing a good job. He said they are working with lifeguards, badge checkers and security and very few issues have come to the officers' attention.

Using ATVs – officers are on them every day. but with crowding it is easier to get through Ortley in the morning and tougher as the day goes by, but the officers love being on them.

The storm took down lots of trees and many traffic lights were out.

Car burglaries in Toms River have spiked. There was one theft from the 3rd Ave lot on July 28 where a thief took an iPad and credit cards out of an unlocked car. He advised to lock your car as most of the burglaries are crimes of opportunity.

Question about what is being done about the narrow area for two-way traffic on East Railway now that parking is allowed on both sides of the street.

He said he would bring it up with Bob Chankalian, the town engineer. Maria said Mr. Chankalian can assess the situation in the off season, including whether to make the street one-way or take away parking on one side of the street. Sgt. Bachonski noted that it is illegal for people to put cones and other traffic control devices in the road themselves.

Mike Wymbs asked about the removal of parking spaces at Fielder and Ocean Avenue on an apron, essentially giving the owner there six parking spots.

Ms. Maruca said that was sanctioned and in compliance with zoning approval.

Question about what actions have been taken since the last meeting, when multiple residents inquired about the serving of alcohol, late and loud gatherings, and sidewalk crowding at Bakin' Bagels. Sgt. Bachonski said he forwarded the complaint to Deputy Chief Belcher, chief of patrol.

Question about electric vehicles/golf carts (low-speed vehicles).

Sgt. Bachonski said they are not illegal, but it is illegal to cross Rt. 35 with them. Paul and Anthony said they would like to make this a golf cart community and that it should not be illegal to cross 35. What about electric bikes? No restrictions yet.

Question about the process of sponsoring a bench on the boardwalk.

Ms. Maruca said people should contact the recreation department to fill out the paperwork and pay the fee, although there might not be any benches available for sponsorship right now.

Cathy Crisafulli said a bike, probably stolen, has been outside her house for two days.

Sgt. Bachonski said he would have a patrol car swing by. Ms. Maruca noted that Lavallette has a bike registration program.

Streetscape Update: Paul Jeffrey

The state gave the town a grant to improve Route 35 North. The OBVTA is participating in the planning. An OBVTA subcommittee just walked the strips to identify areas to improve. Pedestrian lights will be installed from Fielder up to 2nd Avenue, if the budget is there for that, and there will be plantings, benches, bike racks, and trash receptacles added at designated spots and corners. Eight or nine businesses have been contacted, including the new coffee shop, Pop’s, Kohr’s and Rockafella’s, and all have welcomed the improvements. In addition, the designer is in contact with the state to replace dead trees that the state had planted, and the plan will include improvements to gateway areas, such as signage, etc. The goal is to make people want to visit the downtown area and to make it easy for them to get there.

Question about new lights on the boardwalk.

Paul: This is not part of the Streetscape scope, but we hope to address this down the road (hopefully as part of the Surf Club property plan, Anthony said).

Beach Jam: Anthony

Beach Jam was supposed to be this evening but was canceled because of COVID. Anthony said it would be fun to remember past Beach Jams, as we look forward to resuming in 2021, and urged members to dig out their Beach Jam photos and send them to the OBVTA, for posting on its Facebook page. He urged members to get creative and maybe include photos of past paraphernalia, T-shirts, etc.

Question about illegal and persistent fireworks. Paul said to call the police.

Motion to adjourn the meeting (Joe, Cathy).

The next meeting is Sept. 12th, and we will have a guest speaker about the revaluation.

Meeting adjourned at 11:11 a.m.

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