

Ortley Beach Voters and Taxpayers Association
Monthly Meeting
July 18, 2020, 9:30 a.m.
Via Zoom

Membership meeting called to order at 9:28 a.m. (Anthony Colucci)

Moment of reflection and silence for the 136,000 Americans who have died from COVID-19 and the front-line workers; plea to wear masks and follow the safety rules (Anthony Colucci)

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: 33 households online initially, some with multiple members. 67 Zoom calls in attendance at peak. Quorum established.

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

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

Treasurer and Membership reports: Debbie Barton

Expenses for the month included a donation to Monmouth-Ocean County Fulfill and an insurance payment. Cash in bank as of July 1, 2020: \$66,607.

33 additional paid memberships through June.

Anthony said we are behind in membership and reminded members to pay their dues and to help us by enlisting friends and neighbors to join up or renew. The membership year now runs from July 1 to June 30, so renewing now is good for a full year from now.

Motion to accept Treasurer and Membership reports (Paul Jeffrey, Joan Strathern). Approved.

Surf Club Update: Toni Tomarazzo

Toni said the OBVTA board has been closely following the progress of the final negotiations as lawyers work to put into writing their agreement in principle to purchase the Surf Club properties. She asked members for their patience as the work continues and requested that they hold back their questions to public officials so as not to undermine the sensitive negotiations. She said maybe next month we can have a different, more concrete and positive update.

Guest: Ocean County Sheriff Michael Mastronardy

Sheriff Mastronardy updated members about new equipment that has been obtained to allow patrols on the bay. He said sheriffs have the same authority as state police to oversee the waterways, and he has been beefing up equipment and personnel assigned to the bay. He said the department has also been working with Mantoloking, which has its own boat, and under the Homeland Security Grant after 9/11 was able to obtain equipment to provide security from the water for the power plant south of Toms River.

One of the bigger problems, he said, is the number of jet skiers. More than 400 jet skis are bought in Ocean County every year on top of those brought in from outside. He said sheriffs were primarily doing education and had obtained jet skis to patrol.

In addition, the department has a 26-foot recon craft coming. That will mean two sheriffs boats out on the water next summer. And the department has enlisted aircraft that are voluntarily flying over the bay to provide more surveillance.

He said the state police would not partner with any law enforcers unless they carried a gun, so they have started a new protocol for that.

He said his office also provides flags (which are on back order) and key chains.

He warned members about a wave of vehicle thefts from around us, and advised them to lock their high-end cars.

Paul advised members to send additional questions for Sheriff Mastronardy to OBVTA, which will forward to him.

Council Speaker Maria Maruca

6th Terrace elevation: Plans to elevate that area 24 inches to reduce flooding are going to the state, but 10 residents have not yet signed the required letter, despite repeated mailings, etc. She said she will work with Joan Strathern to try to reach those homeowners. She said the goal is to get the plans to the state, get approval, go out to bid and be ready to start the work in the fall. If that doesn't happen, it will have to wait until spring. She is talking to Bob Chankalian, TR engineer, to keep the plan moving forward. She said the use of a traffic calming device was rejected by owners and will no longer be part of the plan.

Other projects to address flooding, including at the corners at Rt. 35 and 6th and 7th, are moving forward. They are waiting to go out to bid.

Beach crowding: She acknowledged concerns about the large numbers of people flocking to the beach this summer, especially in recent days of a heat wave. She said they are monitoring numbers and beach capacity and, while they don't have a specific number in mind, beach personnel are being told to flag when social distancing is no longer possible.

Anthony asked who is responsible for maintaining social distancing on the beach, and pointed out that while COVID-19 numbers are low in Toms River, many people come from outside the area. He noted that Belmar, as well as other nearby towns, are cutting badge sales off because of crowding concerns. He pointed out that with the towns around us restricting access, more people are coming to us.

Mayor Maurice “Mo” Hill said that beach badge sales are up 30% year to date. The township is forbidden to restrict sales to just residents. But he noted that towns such as South Seaside Park, Brick and Berkeley Township are restricting access because they have smaller beaches. He said TR is monitoring the situation and leaving it “fluid.”

Ms. Maruca said the town, because of restrictions related to the dunes and the governor’s order, must continue to sell daily badges but that the town can cut off sale.

Ms. Maruca said Acting Town Business Administrator Lou Amoroso had just this morning sent a message to the beach crew to be vigilant as to crowding driven by the heat wave. She said that recreation director Jared Tate, the lifeguard captain and the beach patrol crews have been monitoring crowding along the beach at specific checkpoints and that they are experienced at this.

Mayor Maurice “Mo” Hill:

The main library in TR is now open M-Th 10-2 and 3-7, and on F, Sat., from 10-2. Smaller branches, including the one in Lavallette, are open M 10-2 and 3-7 and on Th-Sat 10-2. He said there is a capacity limit and that patrons are counted as they come in.

He said he has only gotten positive feedback on the fireworks display in Silver Beach, paid for by a local businessman.

Clawbacks: He said Andy Kim had been instrumental in pushing forward legislation that will exempt Toms River and individuals from having to pay back FEMA loans related to superstorm Sandy. He said the House will be voting on this soon. Paul thanked the members for writing to both local legislators and those in their home (northern) districts to push this legislation forward. Anthony also thanked the New Jersey Organizing Project for being instrumental in supporting this.

Mayor Hill said all the playgrounds are now opening, soccer is about to open, TR Little League has resumed. The Bay-Lea golf course has had the best month in its history. But the ice rink is still closed, and that is having a financial impact on TR.

Restaurants: Still confined to outdoor dining after Gov. Phil Murphy did an about-face on allowing inside seating. He said restaurants that have open windows on two sides can allow indoor seating. He said TR continues to push the governor to reopen the restaurants, which are hurting. Ms. Maruca said open-air restaurants can open if they social distance, and that about

44 restaurants have been approved for open air seating. She thanked members for supporting local restaurants.

Overall COVID-19 numbers are good: TR had 5 additional cases this week but the numbers are way down overall, from 800 to about 200 positive tests. There is no flare-up here.

He said the Seacort Pavilion Theatre is not going to reopen now, and perhaps never, which could have a big impact on that mall area.

Schools: The governor is leaving it up to individual districts and he is hearing that TR district is leaning toward a blend of virtual and in-class return, which he believes does not work on the elementary level.

Questions (multiple) re: Bakin' Bagels being open at night, possibly serving alcohol, loudness, crowding the sidewalk with furniture: Ms. Maruca said she will ask the TRPD to look into it. Sgt. Gene Bachonski later said the issue was new to him and he would let the shift commander know and alert the evening shift.

Question re: clearing the beach because of a storm and what happens if people don't leave: Maria said they are supposed to get everyone off the beach and out of the water, especially in the case of thunder and lightning.

Question about the cleaning schedule for playground equipment: Mayor Hill said all equipment is cleaned at the start of the day but that there is not enough staff to maintain a schedule to sanitize during the day. He said there has not been a lot of guidance from the state on this and that they are relying on people cleaning up for their kids and after themselves. He said the bathrooms on the beach are done a couple of times a day.

Question about the status of the pickle ball courts on the site of the "shell" parking lot on Rt. 35 South: It is in design now. Anthony said OBVTA has not seen anything and requested that we be able to review the design before it is adopted and implemented. Mayor Hill said yes.

Question about the status of the McDonald's (now closed) at the Acme shopping center: No one has heard anything.

Sgt. Gene Bachonski:

He said the Class 1 police officers on the beach are doing a great job. He met with them yesterday and was happy to hear they are engaging with the badge checkers, head lifeguards, etc., to keep on top of things.

He said they would like to use ATVs for the Class 1s to patrol, but the beach is too narrow and now it is too packed to drive one through safely. Joan pointed out that the fact we can't fit ATV patrols on the beach are an indicator of how crowded the beaches have been in the midst of

this pandemic. Sgt. Bachonski disagreed, saying it is just a narrow beach. Anthony asked whether it is possible to create a narrow strip along the dune fence for the ATV to get through. The sergeant said that was not a bad idea and that he would look into that possibility.

He said the biggest complaint he hears about from the beach is smoking, not social distancing. That is reported to the beach patrol officers and lifeguards and they deal with it.

He said that in 99% of the cases, the beach patrol officers are effective in handling a situation, but if they are not, call the PD.

From June 20 to July 17, TR received 216 calls from Ortley, about 7.5 calls/day. There have been 0 calls re: unruly juveniles, unlike on the northern beach, where it is a big problem. 16 were for fireworks, 20 were noise complaints, 10 were car crashes and other motor vehicle issues. There were no big beach issues reported.

Toni said the fireworks near her house are a huge problem and that when she called the police they just drove by and did nothing. She asked how many summonses are issued for fireworks. He said he did not have that report. He said police officers have discretion in how to respond and that the greater goal is education. Toni suggested that the officers report to the complaint and then come back shortly afterward to see if the matter has been resolved. And they also have, under NJ law, the right to confiscate, she pointed out. He said it sometimes does help to make an arrest to set an example.

There will be interviews next week to start processing of beefing up the ranks of the Class 2 officers.

TR has a boat, as well, and several trained officers who patrol the waterways.

Question about E. Railway, which has parking on both sides and is now very narrow for cars to get through: He said he would talk to Bob Chankalian about it.

Question about trees and shrubs on Bay Blvd. median obstructing site: Ms. Maruca said she would have Bob Chankalian reach out to the county, which has oversight.

Question about the location of the badge checkers, whose huge umbrellas and presence discourage people from sitting on the benches at the dune cutouts. Ms. Maruca said she would bring it up with Jared. One member suggested in the chat that the checkers sit on elevated chairs, so the umbrellas are lifted.

OBVTA Records: Joan Strathern

Joan said that she had inherited binders of articles about the early days of the OBVTA and about Ortley that had been sitting in her attic. They have now been donated to the Ocean

County Historical Society Museum and Research Center, located at 26 Hadley Ave., TR, where they can be viewed.

Streetscape: Joan Strathern

An OBVTA subcommittee, town and state reps and designers with the firm NV5, which had been enlisted to help plan spending of a \$1 million grant obtained by TR for improvement in the “downtown” shopping area of Route 35 North and also Ortley’s “gateways,” met earlier in the week. The group reviewed plans for street lights, benches, trash cans, bike racks, and gateway areas. The project picks up where reconstruction after Sandy left off, now focusing on amenities and beautification of the long-neglected area.

The OBVTA committee will walk the strip next week to assess where benches, etc., could go, and also to reach out to local businesses about how to improve the area. NV5 will next send suggestions, based on our initial feedback, for choice of the street furniture we want, etc. NV5 will then finalize the plan, present it to the town council, then present it to the public, presumably at an OBVTA meeting later this year.

Joan said the OBVTA is soliciting suggestions and volunteers to help shape the plans.

This initial project only relates to Rt. 35 North and “gateway” signage on Rt. 35 South, but we are hopeful that once we get that going, we will get other grants that will allow us to spread out from the strip and do more throughout Ortley. She said we are also hoping to engage businesses, who will be inspired to do more on their own and to obtain more grants.

Cathy Crisafulli noted that she had attended a town council meeting a few weeks ago in which a stipend to hire a town grant writer was approved. She suggested that we try to engage the grant writer to help us obtain more money that could perhaps help the rundown storefronts along the strip.

Other Business:

Anthony asked members to check out the OBVTA Facebook page, which we try to keep updated with local news, etc.

Paul said a representative from the historical society is writing a book about Ortley Beach and is looking for people to share interesting stories and photos. Contact Paul if you are interested.

Anthony reiterated a call to boost membership, saying the reason the town, the state and the congressional delegation listen to us is because we have a large and active membership. We have boasted that we have had more than 500 active, paid family memberships, but this year we have dropped below that.

Motion to close the meeting (Joe Cantalupo, Paul). Approved. Anthony urged members to be safe and be respectful to local businesses, etc. Meeting was adjourned at 10:59 a.m.

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