

Ortley Beach Voters and Taxpayers Association
Monthly Meeting
Saturday, Oct. 17, 2020, 9:30 a.m.
Via Zoom

Membership meeting called to order at 9:31 a.m. (Anthony Colucci)

Anthony noted that it is the last regular Association meeting of 2020, though there may be a special meeting/public hearing on the Streetscape plans. More information will be forthcoming. Monthly association meetings will resume in April 2021.

Moment of reflection and silence for the 218,714 Americans who have died from COVID-19 to date (Anthony Colucci)

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

Membership attendance: 44 households online initially. 55 at peak. Membership quorum established.

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

Minutes of the September 2020 Association meeting. Motion to accept. (Cathy, Mike). Accepted.

Treasurer and Membership reports: Debbie Barton
New paperwork was filed with the state re: OBVTA nonprofit status.
Cash on hand at the end of the month was \$58,522.

43 members paid their dues, including 4 new members and those brought in through Dakan Homes, for a total of \$780 in income. The total of paid memberships for the year is now 328, very close to the 350 goal cited in our revised (post-COVID) budget.

Another 150 or so emails went out earlier this week to remind members to pay their 2020 dues, which are good through June 2021. Members can sign up online; by printing out and mailing in the paper form on the OBVTA website; or by dropping by Paul's house on Bay Boulevard, where he has set up a drop box with forms and pens.

Motion to accept the Treasurer and Membership reports (Paul, Mike): Accepted.

Guest Speakers:

Council President Maria Maruca

Clean Ocean Action will hold its annual Beach Sweeps on Normandy and Ortley beaches on Saturday, Oct. 24, from 9 a.m. to about 12:30 p.m. Because of COVID-19, you must register in advance. Here is an FAQ with further information:

<http://www.cleanoceanaction.org/index.php?id=862>

In response to concerns about patchy grass areas on the dunes, Ms. Maruca said the Army Corps of Engineers is responsible and has its own contractor who has a specific plan for each dune. They will be re-planting this year again at areas that have not taken. There will be no volunteer participation. She said they plant a variety of grasses and that Goldenrod appears to have taken best. She said she will get more information and report back to us.

6th Terrace street elevation project is underway. A request for another street elevation, on Coolidge Avenue west of 35 South, has been added to the township's list. She said it is a process to get the projects approved by the state but that the town would put in the request.

Removal of one-hour parking signs on Route 35, across from Rockafella's and Golden Gate Express, had been overlooked. The signs are a vestige from when there was a bank at that location. The township needs to pass an ordinance to have them removed, which she hopes to get on the agenda for the Oct. 27th meeting, with a public hearing on Nov. 10th.

Food distributions are going on at the Presbyterian Church on Hooper Avenue in Toms River every Friday. Food is delivered to Ortley for those in need; just send her an email. The township is partnering with Fulfill to provide Thanksgiving Crisis Boxes, which will be distributed on Friday, Nov. 20th. Again, anyone who needs a delivery should email her. Operation Barbecue will be held on Saturday, Nov. 14, from noon to 2 p.m., where 1,000 barbecue meals will be distributed. There is a group of regular volunteers for these events, but if you wish to volunteer, email her. Anthony said he would send out the information in emails to members and post it on the website.

Mayor Maurice "Mo" Hill:

The latest data on COVID-19 cases show there have been more than 1,000 recent cases in Lakewood, bringing the total there to 5,500.

There are now more than 500 people in hospitals throughout the state. Central part of the state has 176.

Jersey Shore Medical Center has a lot of cases of COVID19 confirmed and patients under investigation for COVID19. Jersey Shore, Monmouth Medical and Community are among the Top 10. That's still low compared to North Jersey. And ICU bed usage throughout the state is only about 20%, compared with 80-90% in March.

One improvement has been better treatments, better outcomes: ie, Vitamin D, Vitamin C, steroids, Remdesivir, CPAP instead of high pressure oxygen. Expect to see vaccines and antivirals the beginning of next year.

Virtual schooling in Toms River is not working, particularly in the grade school. All sports are truncated.

He gets a report from the Community Medical Center and forwards it to the Ocean County Health Dept. He is still waiting for a report including numbers from the Toms River Police Department, but preliminary report shows that 60% of the local COVID19 cases are in the northern part of Toms River.

Asked if he was concerned about upticks, he said it was not like the spring, treatments have changed and there has been no increase in deaths. For all of NJ, the rate of COVID19 positive testing remains less than 3%, while it's more than 3% most everywhere else.

Joan Strathern pointed out that the reduction in numbers has to do with masks, socially distancing and being cautious and we need to keep putting out that message. Mayor Hill said there is an uptick and we are clearly in Round 2, but it's not as fast and furious as Round 1. He said we are in an interconnected world and we are doing what we can.

Toni Tomarazzo asked about the town's experience with compliance. Mayor Hill said the police were monitoring parks during Succoth, particularly after school. He said he thinks most people have been compliant; there have not been a lot of calls or complaints.

Business Administrator Lou Amoruso:

Trick or treating is allowed for Halloween, but people should follow guidelines and use caution: ie, put out candy individually on a tray outside your door.

Question from member, via Paul: Why are we still waiting for bush trimming on Bay Blvd, when overgrowth is hazardous for driving, particularly around Tunney?

Ms. Maruca said she has had no updates from the county and she asks for grass and shrub cutting after every OBVTA meeting.

Mr. Amoruso said OBVTA might be better off reaching out to the county on its own. He asked for a list of the line-of-sight issues.

Question from member re: lagoon dredging near Bayside Park. The area has never been dredged by DEP. Paul said we have repeatedly tried to get help but told it was not forthcoming. He pointed out that Lavallette is doing dredging now and homeowners might want to find out the name of the company and pursue on their own. Ms. Maruca said there are gaps in dredging on the mainland, too. Mr. Amoruso said the DEP looks at the land area near un-dredged areas and might not dredge if there are wetlands nearby, etc. That might be the case in the areas near Bayside Park. Paul said it has been an issue since Sandy.

Question from member re: a street light outage. JCP&L has a website to report such outages, but you must have the number of the post. It is on a metal tag on the pole. OBVTA has contact info for JCP&L on the website.

TRPD Sgt. Bachonski:

He had the one-hour signs on 35 North on his to-do list; he is glad that is being taken care of. There have been two shootings downtown, one a fatality, but there is no threat to the public. Schools: On November 9th, all schools will have hybrid schedules of two days a week in class (Wednesday to be a disinfecting day). All of his officers will be back at work in the schools for three hours a day, he said.

Veterans Park on North Bay Avenue has a Fitness Park. He is proposing some kind of weekly or monthly challenge to allow interaction between the public and police officers. Waiting for approval.

Car seat safety checks have resumed. It is a free service out of the Pleasant Plains Firehouse.

Halloween: Parade is suspended, trick or treating is from 2 to 8 p.m. Be safe.

He thanked the OBVTA for its \$200 donation to the Vest-a-Cop program. In response to a query from a member, Debbie Barton posted the address to send donations, which are still being collected.

Sgt. Bachonski said his promotion to lieutenant is imminent and he is not sure where he will end up. He may not be back when we resume meetings.

Public safety: There has been an increase in phone scams. Don't answer your phone. Lock your car and house doors. Don't leave packages in plain view in parking lots.

Anthony said members have noticed fewer regular police patrol cars in the area. Has staffing been decreased? Sgt. Bachonski said it has been reduced since the summer, with the end of summer staff, but no more than that. He said he will mention the observation to the deputy chief.

Paul asked how many officers are assigned to the island. He said there are two officers on the 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. shift; two on the evening shift, overlapping from 1 p.m. to 6 p.m. (so four officers) and two more picking up at midnight. The highest number of calls is from 1 to 6, thus there are four officers on duty then.

Asked if there was any follow up on reports of fireworks incidents, he said he tracked down an incident reported by Toni Tomarazzo and found out that the officers did not respond because they were dispatched elsewhere at the time. He said fireworks calls are up and they are a growing problem. He said the TRPD might need to track the reports better and assign a special unit to follow up on them.

Is there an active Neighborhood Watch program? Not now. Hard to get volunteers. Discussion about how homeowners could be unofficial watchers. Also the Ring doorbell system can be an effective watchdog and deterrent.

Council Meetings:

Toni noted the poor quality of the video and sound from the bi-monthly Town Council meetings. Mr. Amoruso said he had looked into it. There have been some glitches but the bigger problem is that people are not speaking directly into the microphones so it is difficult to hear even in the room. He said he is satisfied that the system is working well overall. Toni said the system is inferior to what other towns have.

Dune access: Joe Cantalupo

Joe said seniors and people with disabilities continue to complain that they are having difficulty climbing the dunes, particularly when using canes or carrying chairs. Directing them to the handicapped ramps does not help because that just increases the distance they have to walk on the sand to unite with family and friends. He is proposing a simple stainless steel bar be added to the walkway rails. He said he reached out to Lou Amoruso, who directed him to Town Engineer Bob Chankalian, but Chankalian told him adding the bars would create a liability risk, as people will sit on them and will break them. Joe said the design he has in mind won't create those problems.

Joan underscored Joe's comments, saying it is difficult to climb the ramps without a hand rail and she asked if the town could coordinate with the Army Corps of Engineers to find a solution.

Joe asked Mayor Hill and Ms. Maruca to meet him and Anthony at one of the walkways next week so he can show them how easy it would be to add the railings. They said they would reach out to him and set up a day and time.

Emergency Response Time: Mike Wymbbs

Mike said there was an incident at the Moose the previous Saturday night where a man suffered a stroke. It took the EMTs 18 minutes to arrive, and 20 minutes for the paramedics, and no patrol car was ever sent. Mike raised the possibility of the town contracting with Triboro to provide ambulance service; they operate in Seaside Heights, Seaside Park, South Seaside Park and Island Beach State Park and are on duty 24/7. Mike noted that in the 70s and 80s we had a full-time rig in Ortley and now nothing. He said there could be a crisis if first responders are coming from the mainland and the bridge is up.

Ms. Maruca said 911 calls go to the county dispatcher. Because of COVID19 they are no longer dispatching police vehicles to every call. She said a lot of the time, Triboro IS called first, but if they are busy the call goes back to Toms River. She said the town has a number of shared services agreements with numerous services on the barrier island. She said the town is in the midst of an efficiency study and she will ask the contractor to look into improving services to the island. Mike said the shared services contract with the Seaside Heights fire department is working well and might be a way to go. Ms. Maruca said she would take another look and get back to us.

Paul asked if the town could provide any more information on its efficiency survey. Ms. Maruca said the contractor is now compiling data and meeting with department heads. Mr. Amoruso said the study will take 12 weeks, with the first six weeks in the field. They are looking at every component of township government and are expected to turn in a report by the end of the year. At that point, it becomes public record.

Voting: Paul

Paul noted that all members were emailed an extensive FAQ about voting under the new COVID19 rules. The document is also posted on our website. Mary Ann Wallis told members that the document included a link so they could track their ballot, and make sure that it arrived

safely, at the Board of Elections. Joan said it will also let you know if/when your ballot is counted. Anthony said the count in NJ does not begin before Election Day.

Member Comments:

Pickle Ball Courts:

The final plans for the pickle ball courts that are to be added on 35 South at 6th Avenue were approved by the council at a recent meeting. Paul and members expressed concern over whether the final plans reflected feedback we received from members. Michelle Bucci, a member who had made suggestions, had concerns about lighting, screening, etc., based on her experience with pickle ball courts in Florida. Ms. Maruca said she would look at the plans with Bob Chankalian and make sure the issues were addressed.

Member Roxanne Graham noted that she had received a large bill for adjusted taxes owed, with the entire amount added to her third quarter payment this year, amounting to a payment of five times the usual amount. She said she just wanted to bring the town's practice to other members' attention.

Surf Club: Toni Tomarazzo

Toni said we are learning more about the agreement in principle for purchasing the Surf Club from the Barcelonas, though we do not know every detail. She said the town has said it will put money it gets from selling two pieces of property in Toms River (one contiguous with Cattus Island Park, one contiguous with Ocean County Community College) to the county towards its portion of the purchase price. However, the county must approve the sale, and that is mired in bureaucracy. Toni and Paul have called county officials (following a 55-member demonstration outside the Board of Freeholders pre-meeting last month) and were told that things are on track for the open space committee, the planning department and the Freeholders to approve a change in procedures for spending open space money, and that it could go to the Freeholders at their Nov. 18th meeting. Toni said the county's efforts to purchase the properties have so far been disappointing and confusing, but we are remaining vigilant and will continue to push for the transaction to be completed. At the same time, we are also continuing to hold Toms River responsible for making this deal happen, and asking them to seek other sources of funding to close the price gap, without waiting for the county to act. Waiting for the county will likely mean the transaction won't be completed until late January/early February, given review periods, meeting dates, etc. She said the purchase continues to be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and if the town can spend more than a million dollars on a boat ramp and \$400,000 for a skate ramp on the mainland, it could find bridge gap money to consummate the deal. In sum, she said we will stay vigilant with Ocean County and continue to encourage Toms River to enact a gap measure. We will keep the members informed and may need to call on them again for demonstrations similar to the one we held outside the Ocean County Courthouse last month.

Mr. Amoruso said Toms River is working hard to make this transaction happen.

Streetscape: Joan Strathern

Streetscape started at least 5 years ago with a million-dollar grant from the Federal Government to improve Ortleys main strip along 35 North, as well as the gateway entrances and exits on 35 North, 35 South and Bay Boulevard. The design firm hired by Toms River, NV5, provided a map to the Streetscape committee showing existing lighting and features and adding amenities like pedestrian street lamps, benches, bike racks, trash bins, newsstands, etc. The plan requires a public hearing that will probably be organized through the OBVTA but include all community members. It will probably need to be a virtual meeting. A date has not been set.

Motion to close and adjourn meeting: Approved. Meeting adjourned. Next meeting in April.

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