

Ortley Beach Voters and Taxpayers Association
Monthly Meeting
Saturday, Sept. 12, 2020, 9:30 a.m.
Via Zoom

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

Moment of reflection and silence for the 191,776 Americans who have died from COVID-19 to date, and in memory of those who died on 9/11 (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: 43 households online initially. 63 at peak. Quorum established.

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

Minutes of the August 2020 Association meeting. Motion to accept. (Cathy, Paul). Accepted.

Treasurer and Membership reports: Debbie Barton

Revenue for August included \$360 for dues – 10 members via PayPal, 2 via check. One is a new business member. Expenses included \$1,735 for Constant Contact. \$7.23 interest. Cash on hand as of 8-31-20: \$61,300.

Treasurer's and Membership reports accepted (Paul, Mary Ann).

Census: Paul Jeffrey

Paul and Anthony urged members to fill out their census forms. Paul pointed out that NJ gets less than 60 cents on every dollar it sends to Washington and deserves full representation. The census is due to close on Sept. 30th and officials estimate that 1 in every 5 NJ households has not been officially counted. He said not only the state, but Toms River will lose out on money if there is not an accurate count. Census takers are now going door to door. Though many people are reluctant to open the door because of the risk of the coronavirus, the takers find a way to get the info safely. A link to the Census is on the OBVTA website under "useful links."

Guest Speakers:

Council President Maria Maruca

Ms. Maruca asked Toni Tomarazzo to make a statement discouraging questions about the Surf Club deal so as not to upset the delicate negotiations. Toni said the board had decided that we would not make such a statement at this meeting. Ms. Maruca then made the statement herself, asking the members to refrain from asking questions at this time.

For the first time, the beaches are being staffed and kept open into September. 2020 badges are still valid and required.

The 6th Terrace street elevation project contract was awarded. Preliminary work has begun. Cathy Crisafulli said contractors have started to mark utilities. Now that prepping has begun, the heavy work is not far behind. Streets are very narrow but Ms. Maruca said contractors have been able to manage on similar streets and do well. She said Joan Strathern will be the eyes and ears for the area.

At the request of neighbors, No Left Turn signs were installed beneath the Stop signs on Beier and Nichols Avenues at Fourth Avenue.

Crews were sent to Bayside Park to clean it. It was noted that the flag in the park is exceptionally battered. Ms. Maruca said the county rotates and replaces flags on a set schedule, but they would ask for replacement of the park flag to be expedited as it takes more of a beating on the Bay.

The township is following up with the county to perform tree and brush trimming on Bay Boulevard to improve visibility.

Asked about clawback legislation in Congress, Ms. Maruca said there has not been an update but that she will let us know when she hears anything.

The township council passed a resolution opposing a JCP&L rate hike, noting their poor performance in restoring power after Hurricane Isaias this summer. She said the council has passed a resolution calling on the Monmouth and Ocean County freeholders to appoint a Toms River representative to the Utilities Board. Cathy Crisafulli asked whether action could be taken against Optimum, as well, or could rival providers be brought in to improve cable service. Mayor Mo Hill said he would follow up.

Pickle ball courts are on the way. Anthony will provide more details.

Anthony again brought up how poorly the audio transmission is from the Town Council meetings. For instance, at the previous meeting, only the voices from the dais could be heard and Paul said he could not hear anything Mayor Hill said. OBVTA again requested that the system be replaced to something more like what's offered by other municipalities – especially since in the pandemic, people are being discouraged from gathering indoors. Mayor Hill said he had talked to the IT department and that they intend to upgrade in the coming year. He said he will ask to accelerate the upgrade. Lou Amoruso, the new town business administrator (upon the departure of Don Guardian) said he would look into it.

Mr. Amoruso was asked about the trailer in the 3rd Avenue lot, which a member called an eyesore. He said it stores beach patrol vehicles and would be removed at the end of the season. He said it is used every year.

Anthony reminded Mr. Amoruso that the wheel on the kayak ramp is broken. Mr. Amoruso said it is on order.

Toni Tomarazzo applauded the council for asking for a local representative to be appointed to the Board of Public Utilities, but asked if a barrier island person could be appointed upon the next opening at the OCUA, as well – especially since they have a significant parcel of property here that greatly affects residents. Ms. Maruco said she would reach out to the freeholders when a seat is vacated but that they already have one or two seats filled by Toms River people. Mayor Hill said he writes letters every year to the OCUA requesting that Ortley Beach be allowed to use the OCUA site for recreation. He said he will inquire about the next opening. Toni said it is egregious how poorly Ortley is treated by the OCUA. She said so many OCUA members are double dipping on pensions, a benefit that seems to have priority over representation of residents.

Joe Cantalupo said there is limited visibility on Tunney across from the garden store. Maria said she would request that the county send someone. He also again requested railings along beach ramps to help the elderly reach the beach. Ms. Maruca urged him to get with Mr. Amoruso to see if it can be done.

Mayor Mo Hill:

Mayor Hill started his formal remarks by announcing his appointment of Mr. Amoruso at the last council meeting as the town's new business administrator. He offered thanks to Don Guardian and said he had kept Mr. Guardian on, after he was elected mayor, to help with the transition. The change was delayed by Mr. Guardian's recent illness (stroke). He said he was impressed by the job that Mr. Amoruso had done while Mr. Guardian was ill – particularly how he worked with unions to achieve furloughs during the early days of the pandemic, saving the town a lot of money. He was also able to reduce the number of confidential employees by 10, saving the town about a million dollars a year. And he had broken a logjam over radio frequencies involving the Monmouth County and Ocean County sheriffs' offices, with an acceptable plan presented to the state.

The property revaluation is about to commence. The assessors will start their exterior inspections of properties, and will work their way over from the west side of town at the Manchester border. The first inspections will take place next week.

Board of Public Utilities: Mayor Hill reiterated the poor performance by JCP&L after the hurricane, with 42,000 of 49,000 customers out of service and some not seeing service restored for 72 hours or more. He said he was almost to the point of declaring an emergency because of the severe impact upon senior communities. He said he does not think a rate increase is necessary or warranted at this point.

Re: cable TV service: He said he would bring it up in his regular meeting with Ocean County mayors.

Anthony thanked Mr. Amoruso for sending reval info to us and was grateful the barrier island will be last in the process. Mr. Amoruso said a letter will go out about a week before each “batch” and Anthony said he would post all notices on the OBVTA website. Mr. Amoruso said there is a number to call if you don’t want the exterior of your house inspected. Anthony told members that info is available on the township website, as well as the tax assessor’s section of the town website. Joan asked if they anticipate doing exterior inspections for all properties. Mr. Amoruso said typically yes. With Covid, he said, he’s not sure what will happen with interior inspections.

Question about where to send questions re: Bayside Terrace: Bob Chankalian, the town engineer, and Mr. Amoruso.

Question about whether there are other streets next to be elevated. Ms. Maruca said she was not sure what locations were on the list. Mr. Amoruso said raising streets is going to be an ongoing process and the town will be continually evaluating flooding problems, etc.

Discussion about homeowners who defied town rules and built a full third floor or other enhancements outside of their Certificate of Occupancy and how that might affect revaluations.

Sgt. Bachonski:

Full-time officers will continue on the beach, but the summer staff is largely gone. Majority of the summer officers have moved to the schools, and some now have permanent positions at the jail, but a small number will be at the beach on weekends.

Car break-ins: He said there have been a few but they have mostly occurred where owners left the car doors unlocked. He said the break-ins seem to be dying down.

He suggested that residents lock their car and house doors and get outdoor video to discourage burglaries.

He said there were four calls re: fireworks over the last month, but by the time officers got there they could not find anything and no action could be taken. Toni said she has witnessed the police arriving too late and questioned why the police could not be continually patrolling Ortley so they could see what she sees at Coolidge and Washington. She said the police should not be waiting for residents to report the fireworks that are causing such a disturbance.

Sgt. Bachonski said there were “juvenile problems” this summer, mostly on the north beaches, but on a recent weekend there were about 50 kids between Ocean and 8th and Ocean and 5th. On Labor Day there were about 75 kids on the beach. Police were actively monitoring, he said, and there were no problems.

He said there were a few bike thefts at the end of August.

Joe asked if the driving concerns on Coolidge and Fort were a dead issue, and he said they were.

Questions and concerns about the failure to abide by bike rules and the danger that creates. The PD was urged to be more assertive and enforce the laws more frequently, especially when people are on 35 North but driving south and against traffic.

Anthony noted an upcoming fundraiser to buy vests for Toms River cops and said the OBVTA would be making a donation.

New Business:

Anthony said that the township is about to build pickle ball courts in the “seashell parking lot” on Route 35 South and 6th. He said he was shown a drawing of three courts. The OBVTA had asked the town to keep the shells in the parking lot, for drainage and appearance, rather than blacktopping the lot, and they have agreed. He said Ortlely will still be able to keep most of the parking spaces in that lot. He said the parking issue should ease if the Surf Club deal goes through. Ms. Maruca said bike racks will also be added and the courts should look really nice. Questions about lighting: She said there will be lighting but only directly onto the courts and not into neighboring properties and that the town was very cognizant of lighting concerns.

Anthony thanked members for posting Beach Jam photos on the OBVTA Facebook page, as requested. He encouraged people to visit our Facebook page.

Paul talked about membership. The new organizing system, EventBank (now called GlueUp) has a button that allows credit card payments but the payments still go through PayPal. You don't have to have a PayPal account to pay that way. He said 219 members got an email saying they had not paid dues this year. He apologized for anyone who got an email who had already paid. He noted that membership has been lagging and it is our main source of funds. Those who had not paid could do so online through PayPal; use the paper form and mail a check; or drop off payment in a drop box at his house on Bay Blvd. New members: There is a separate button on the website for new membership. Most of the new members are being reached through Dakan Homes and Tim O'Shea real estate. He also noted that the board recently shifted the membership period so that a paid membership now will be current through June 2021 (the membership year now goes from July 1 to June 30). That means those who paid in 2020 are getting six months of “free” membership until next July 1.

Paul noted that the Friends of Ortlely Beach would be doing its first post-season Kite Night on Sept. 17, as the event has been so popular.

Discussion about streets leaving Toms River and joining up with Lavallette and Seaside Heights.

Motion to close and adjourn meeting: Approved. Meeting adjourned at 10:51 a.m. The next membership meeting is Saturday, Oct. 17.

#####