

The April 17th General Meeting was overflowing with Questions from the OBVTA and Answers from our Toms River Representatives, Councilwoman Maria Maruca , Mayor Mo Hill, Town Business Administrator Lou Amoruso, Town Engineer Bob Chankalian and TRPD Lt. Gene Bachonski.

Given the volume of information we believe it is important to inform all our members. This communication will address those responses. In the interest of length, a second communication will address the remainder of the April Meeting.

**1. The beach and dunes:** Mr. Chankalian said a devastating nor'easter in February caused extensive damage to the beach, walkways, fences and dunes, particularly between the Block House and Lord House. The town reached out to the Army Corps of Engineers but was told that the damage had not been extensive enough to warrant their intervention ahead of their normal 5-year beach replenishment schedule. The town on Tuesday approved a \$438,525 contract with Earle Asphalt to replace sand on the beach. Their work is expected to start on May 5th and will take about 8 days. Then the township will come in to repair the walkovers, fencing and dunes, as well as bulldoze to regrade other parts of the beaches, followed by placement of the mats. The state via the Department of Environmental Protection will provide some of the funding and FEMA will be asked to kick in some funds (now that the town has an "engineered beach" post-Sandy, it is eligible for FEMA assistance).

Mayor Hill said that representatives from Toms River and other towns like Bay Head that were severely affected by the storm met with the Army Corps of Engineers and were told the AC of E would be back next year. Before the storm, the AC of E was not able to predict the "hot spots" along the shore that would need special attention. Now it knows that Ortley, Bay Head and parts of LBI are "hot spots" in need of additional measures, which they will address next year per their 5-year replenishment obligation.

A member asked whether the beach at 5th and 6th avenues would be restored to the width that it was supposed to be. Mr. Chankalian said he was not aware

that any section of the beach was narrower than the promised 100-feet and that the AC of E certified that at the conclusion of the replenishment.

Anthony Colucci showed photos and noted that the joints and caps of the metal rails along the boardwalk were badly rusted and could injure someone. Mr. Chankalian said he would have Buildings and Grounds take a look and apply a rust coat or replace the caps.

2. Mr. Chankalian responded to a concern that Toms River was putting up obstacles that discouraged businesses from coming to the Route 35 North strip. He said the town has always been willing to meet and come up with ideas to encourage business. He pointed out that, at the OBVTA's request, the town removed one-hour parking signs from across from Rockafella's and changed the code so that businesses could count parking spaces up to 1000 feet away toward their parking requirement. He also said the town was working with the OBVTA on the Streetscapes improvement project (a nearly \$1 million grant through the state that allows for amenities and improvements along the business blocks), but that it is still in review with the state and thus out of Toms Rivers' hands.

3. **Paving:** A member said the recent council meeting in which street paving locations were cited was not intelligible via the video feed, so asked if any Ortley streets were slated for re-paving. Mr. Chankalian said it was only three years ago that the entire town was re-paved and so no new re-paving is scheduled right now.

4. **6th Avenue Elevation Project:** Mr. Chankalian said the contractors are hoping to top-pave by the end of the month and that the completion of the project is on track.

5. **Street Cleaning:** A member asked if there is a street cleaning schedule for Ortley. Mr. Amoruso, said there was a plan for the entire town, including Ortley, and that sweeps would increase during the summer season.

6. **Pickle Ball Courts:** The bids to construct pickle ball courts, add bike racks, stretch equipment, etc., which is to be located on the "shell" parking lot on Route 35 South, are due on April 27th. Mr. Chankalian said he is hoping the

town council can approve the contract at the first meeting in May, but that the construction would probably not be completed until late summer.

**7. Beach badges:** Ms. Maruca said badges can be purchased now for \$45 at the Recreation Office in Warren Point and in the office of the tax collector. They will go up to \$60 on Memorial Day weekend, when they will be available at the Lifeguard Stand (Lord House). The day rate is \$10/day during the week and \$11/day on weekends and holidays. She said the cost of badges is now comparable to other communities. A member asked why the town waits so long to sell badges at the Lifeguard Station; Ms. Maruca said this is the same schedule the town follows every year and that it is dependent upon staffing. Asked why the town does not sell the badges online, Ms. Maruca said the town would like to and is moving to improved technology overall.

**8. Surf Club:** Ms. Maruca said the purchase of the three Surf Club properties is moving ahead. The money paid by Ocean County for Toms River land (which will be used for the town's portion of the Surf Club purchase price) is expected to be in the town banking account within 30 days. The state is moving ahead on contract plans and getting information to Lawrence Bathgate, the lawyer for the Barcellona family, which owns the properties. It has been sitting with the state for a while, and there's nothing Toms River can do to move it along, as the state controls the purchase and closing process. The DEP has requested that the parking lot on Ocean Boulevard be a clamshell lot, rather than asphalt, and the town has consented (it has already created a clamshell lot for Ortlely on Route 35 South). Other than that, things are moving forward and everything's been positive.

Mr. Amoruso said a sticking point over the last few months between the state and the township had been how to demolish the remaining foundation, house and concrete parking lot and what will be allowed to be put up in the cleared space. He said there has been a lot of back and forth between the Blue Acres people (waterfront property) and the Green Acres people (land/the parking lot), but there are no impediments to moving forward.

Mayor Hill said the money from the county will be put in the town's open space account within 30 days and it will be ready for the deal to be consummated by

the state. The demolition issue will be part of the contract, with a lingering question about putting money aside in escrow for it.

A member asked if the state and town have gone to contract. Ms. Maruca said they have not, but the Barcellona family is OK with that.

Anthony Colucci asked if the town's preliminary plan for use of the Surf Club property is still in effect (it called for an extended boardwalk, community center and playground, among other amenities). Ms. Maruca said the town has a concept plan and that's what the town is hammering out with the DEP. She said the state wants minimal development and is requiring a high level of detail, down to the kind of dune grass that can be planted. Anthony said the OBVTA would like to be involved in the planning. Mr. Amoruso said the Green Acres folks want spaces to be as natural as possible and likely want the asphalt in the parking lot ripped up. The Green Acres people purchase land that is prone to flooding, so they also want minimal development on the site. He said, however, it's safe to say that a boardwalk area and hopefully a pavilion will be in the plans.

**9. Houses of Worship agreement:** A member asked about the town's recent agreement with the federal government about the size of lots required for religious institutions and whether it would lead to busing like in Lakewood. Mr. Amoruso said busing is a school board issue. He and Mayor Hill explained details of the agreement reached with the federal government, which basically reverts zoning requirements to 2017 levels. He said there will be an interactive map on the town's website that will show exactly how the zoning will affect neighborhoods. In sum, houses of worship will not be allowed in what are known as "neighborhood streets." Mayor Hill said the town tried to negotiate a deal but the federal government rejected the plan and the town then settled. The agreement should last five years.

**10. Route 35 South:** A member asked for a cleanup of the trash and weeds along the Route 35 South corridor. Mr. Amoruso said that is the state's responsibility and a perpetual issue and they will again call the state to get a cleanup.

**11. Taxes, revaluation and services:** A member noted the considerable amount of new building going on in Ortley Beach and other parts of the barrier island. Given that Ortley has been paying 25 to 27 percent of all Toms River taxes, what is Toms Rivers' expectation for how much will be coming from Ortley towards the Toms River budget?

Mayor Hill explained the ongoing revaluation process. The revaluation company is expected to complete its exterior inspections by June 1. The state, which sets the revaluation guidelines, has prohibited indoor inspections because of Covid. Instead, the assessor will either look at plans registered with the township or request that the homeowner conduct a virtual tour. Mayor Hill said many of the documents for Ortley homes are relatively up to date, given all of the recent construction. After that, Mayor Hill said, the schedule is:

- November: Reassessment notices and a month of hearings
- Jan. 25: Revaluation cards to be mailed out.
- May 1st: New assessments will take effect.'
- Revised tax bills will go out by next summer.

Toni Tomarazzo asked if the town expects a big rise in tax appeals. Mayor Hill said that because so much was recently built on the barrier island after Sandy, the town has recent plans on file and so don't expect many disputes on the barrier island. Ms. Maruca said the town is expecting a similar number of appeals – about 4,000 – as the last reval. Mayor Hill said that, instead of the town handling all of the appeals itself, like last time, the company hired to do the revaluations will also handle the appeals, as part of their contract.

Toni repeated the question about whether the town expects an increased contribution toward the budget from Ortley Beach. Mayor Hill said the question is "premature." Mr. Amoruso said the purpose of the reval is to "place true value."

Anthony Colucci asked whether the tax assessor could come to an OBVTA meeting and answer some questions. Mayor Hill said it is premature; it would be better to have him closer to the November notices.

**12. COVID funding:** A member asked how the \$10 million in federal Covid relief assistance (CARES ACT) earmarked for Toms River would be spent. Ms.

Maruca said there are no guidelines yet; they only know the money has to be spent over 2 years. Until the town gets clear federal and state guidelines, they have no information. Mr. Amoruso said the best info is that the town will get \$10.1 million to be spent over two years, with \$20 million for the school system.

**13. Fire services:** A member asked about how fire district service and funding is handled. Mr. Amoruso said Ortley is part of District 1, which covers about 60% of Toms River, primarily the eastern portion. District 1 has a budget of about \$8.1 million, \$5.67 million of which is tax dollars. District 2's budget is less than \$3.5 million, with \$2.9 million coming from taxes. Fire district taxes makes up 3% of a homeowners' overall tax bill (with 50% for schools, 20% for the county, 27% for the municipality).

Toni Tomarazzo asked why we are paying 3% of our tax bill for fire services that are provided by volunteers and don't serve Ortley Beach. She suggested that the town contract with Seaside Heights and the Ocean Beach fire company for services to Ortley. Ms. Maruca said the town has mutual aid agreements with Lavallette and Seaside Heights. While there is no Ortley Beach firehouse, service is provided throughout the district and through those side agreements. Toni asked which is the first responder. Mr. Amoruso and Ms. Maruca said they believe it is Seaside Heights. Anthony said it would be helpful to have a representative of the fire department answer questions at one of our meetings to make us feel more secure about what they provide us for our tax dollars.

**14. Efficiency study:** A member asked about the status of the efficiency study contracted by the town last year. Mr. Amoruso said it is expected to be completed in the next week or two and will be presented to a council subcommittee. He said he could not share information about it before it is seen by the council committee.

**15. Ambulance services:** Mr. Amoruso said the town, at the OBVTA's request, met with TriBoro ambulance company, based in Seaside, last fall to discuss whether they could provide emergency response service to Ortley to speed up response times. (The request had followed concerns about the town's nine-minute response to a person who suffered a stroke at the Moose Lodge.) TriBoro is now Toms River's backup and serves as the primary responder until Toms River can respond. Anthony asked why doesn't the town just make

TriBoro the first responder? Mr. Amoruso said the town will review it but usually has a rig on the island during the summer. Anthony asked where that rig is during the summer, as he did not recall seeing it.

**16. Railings along the beach walkovers for the elderly and disabled:** Mr. Amoruso said he would meet with board member Joe Cantalupo, as soon as Joe is able, at the walkovers to discuss whether adding railing is possible.

**17. Spring cleanup:** Can we have an OB-wide collection day to get rid of trash? Mr. Amoruso said the sheer volume from such an event is unmanageable. The town has a program in place so that residents can call the town to pick up their large items. As for the beach parking lot, dunes, streets, etc., he said he would get someone to Ortlely to clean up and also to talk with Acme about better maintaining their parking lot.

**18. Town Meetings:** Mr. Amoruso said some of the CARES Act funding coming to the town will be allocated to improve telecommunications so that the town will finally have a state of the art system for meetings. The OBVTA has been calling for improved streaming of town meetings so that members and other residents could better monitor them.

**19. Altice:** Following a state hearing on poor service by Altice, the telecommunications company, the company has been willing to meet with users and hear their complaints, Mr. Amoruso said. He said he can arrange a meeting with Ortlely residents who want to speak with a representative about their service, and that the town is asking for very specific complaints/instances of poor or interrupted service, fees, etc. that include dates, times, addresses, etc., to document problems.

**20. JCP&L:** Ms. Maruca said the town is very unhappy with the performance of JCP&L, particularly following a severe and destructive January blackout, and will take up the matter with the Board of Public Utilities and ask the legislature to change laws that protect utilities in such instances. She said she is particularly angry that JCP&L urged the town to encourage residents to file claims for damages from the event – and then every claim was denied. She said a resident is in the process of collecting information to assist in the complaint.

**21. COVID19:** Mayor Hill said thanks to town personnel, the human resources department, Mr. Amoruso and the town's CFO, Toms River was able to get through a year of Covid without a tax increase by reducing positions in town hall to the amount of \$1.5 million and without cutting services such as garbage pickups, etc. A vaccination clinic for seniors set up at the senior center accomplished 501 vaccinations. He said he hopes that by the summer restaurants are back, the boardwalks are thriving and things are largely back to normal. Despite high rates in Ocean County, hospitalizations have come down. Asked if there are any plans for social distancing, masks, etc., on the beach this summer, Mr. Amoruso said he has been in constant contact with Jared Tate, the rec director, and is awaiting direction from the state. But overall things went well last year with no instance of confrontation or transmission.

**22. Storm flow backflow:** A member asked if the town would reconsider its decision to not install storm drain backflow devices for flood areas. Ms. Maruca said the devices have been tried and have not worked.

**23. Sewer Authority property:** A member requested that the town get the sewer authority to better maintain its property. Ms. Maruca said it would reach out.

**24. Beach lockers:** A member asked if the town had considered installing lockers at the beach, like Sea Bright. Mayor Hill said there is nowhere to do it except to lose parking spaces.

**TRPD Lietenant Walter Bachonski:**

Lt. Bachonski was congratulated for his promotion to lieutenant. Because his area of oversight includes community affairs, he will continue to be the liaison to the OBVTA and attend our meetings.

**1. Fireworks:** He said fireworks are now a priority for Toms River and that Deputy Chief Belcher recently relayed that to shift commanders. From now on, the TRPD will focus on collecting information on addresses that are frequently cited in fireworks complaints. He said the PD will try to nip the problem in the bud at the start of the season.

**2. Summer Officers:** Memorial Day marks the kickoff for the Class 1 program: unarmed officers who supplement officers in Ortley during the summer season. He said the program worked well last year, even with Covid. The procedure for complaints at the beach are the same: Tell a lifeguard. They have done a good job of contacting the police to resolve problems.

**3. Marijuana legalization:** The new law has handcuffed the police when dealing with drugs or alcohol and minors. Police cannot detain or start an investigation into anyone under age 21 that they suspect of concealing alcohol or marijuana. He said the legislature has been asked to revise the law. Ms. Maruca said the council is looking to pass a resolution not allowing dispensaries or marijuana retail sites within TR. As of now there are none in Toms River.

**4. Phone scams:** The TRPD does not solicit contributions over the phone. Avoid this scam and don't answer the phone if you don't recognize the caller.

**5. Crossing guards:** The town is now hiring crossing guards. Pay is \$12/hour. You can apply through the Toms River website.

**6. Police officer applications:** The TRPD is starting to accept applications for police officer openings May 1.

**7. Parking:** A member asked of plans for policing parking this summer. He said now the streets are all paved and spots marked, which makes the officers' job much easier. The post-Sandy free-for-all is now over. He said his officers are told to avoid writing a ticket and try to work it out. Asked what will be done about homeowners who blacked out lines in front of their houses, he said he will be here before May 1st and will ride around and check it out.

**8. Service dogs:** Asked about the policy about service dogs on the beach, he said he would look into the matter and Ms. Maruca said the town will see what it can do on its end.

**9. Noise:** There are no time limits associated with noise. If there is excessive noise and it is within 100 feet of a complainant, the police can take action.

**10. Intruder complaint:** A member said that during the winter a neighbor who had installed a Ring system got notice of an intruder. When the neighbor called the TRPD, he was told nothing could be done. Lt. Bachonski said if there is no one there to provide a report ... However, he said he would hope that a patrol officer would have driven around and checked out the property. He said he would follow up.

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## Fire Department Election:

Below are the results of the Fire Company election:

Raymond Latshaw 617

John Sudia 405

Budget

Yes 636

No 507

Chiefs Vehicles

yes 572

No 562

Ladder Truck

Yes 894

No 248

Utility pickup Trucks

Yes 894

No 248

Fire Training Center upgrades

Yes 792

No 348