

Ortley Beach Voters and Taxpayers Association
August Membership Meeting
Saturday, August 14, 2021, 9:30 a.m. (Beach Day)
Via Zoom

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

Pledge and Moment of Reflection for victims of COVID-19 and those who gave the ultimate sacrifice for our country (Mike Wymbs).

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

Membership attendance: 41 participants at start; 64 participants at peak. Membership quorum established.

Future meetings: Anthony

Anthony said the July meeting was canceled because of the rising threat in Ocean County from the COVID-19 Delta variant. The meeting had been our first attempt in more than a year to meet in person at the Moose Lodge, and with cases continuing to go up it will remain the only attempt for the rest of this year. Monthly meetings will be held via Zoom through 2021.

Minutes of the June 19, 2021 Association meeting presented. (July meeting was canceled because of COVID-19). Motion to accept. (Mike Wymbs, Debbie Barton). Accepted.

Treasurer and Membership reports: Debbie Barton

Expenses for July included fees, meeting expenses and purchases for the plant giveaway in July.

Cash on hand: \$65,014

Year to date 483 resident members have paid their dues and 239 new members signed up, bringing the paid membership total to 744 (plus business memberships).

Debbie congratulated the effort that went into the plant giveaway in July at the Moose, which went smoothly despite the last-minute cancellation of the July meeting.

Motion to accept the report. (Mary Ann, Cathy). Accepted.

GUEST SPEAKERS:

Council Member Maria Maruca

Mayor Maurice "Mo" Hill

Business Administrator Lou Amoruso

Lt. Gene Bachonski

Ms. Maruca:

- **Surf Club:** The Toms River Council approved the allocation of \$685,000, the township's portion, toward the purchase of the Surf Club. The money will come from the town's Open Space Trust

Fund, drawing on money gained from the sale of township properties to Ocean County for this express purpose. The sale of the properties to Ocean County is still pending, slowed up because the DEP, which is allocating the bulk of the money for the Surf Club purchase, requires that title searches go back 100 years. Those title records are on paper, and the hours of the county records room are restricted because of COVID-19 precautions. At the second reading of the ordinance to allocate the funds, Town Attorney Merlino said, "I like to think we're on third base right now" and predicted the deal would be closed by the end of the year. Mayor Hill said he has been in contact with the county regularly to check on the progress of the title search and he is optimistic: "We're getting close to third base and ready to tag up and come home." He said he hopes to see the deal close by Election Day. Anthony Colucci noted that the ordinance approved by the Council set out a December date for demolition of the properties. He asked if the town has a timetable. Mr. Amoruso said the demolition would be almost contiguous with the purchase of the land – ie, once there is a closing date, the wrecking can begin. He said the ordinance authorizes the mayor to sign the contract and that once the title search is done, they can move ahead.

- **Empty parking lot on 35 North and 7th Avenue:** Ms. Maruca, in response to a question, said the lot, which is owned by the Barcellona family, owners of the Surf Club properties, is not part of this deal. Anthony said nevertheless we have hopes for that lot regarding its development into retail and condos, but that the Barcellohas have discretion to do what they want with that property.
- **Pickle ball court:** Construction of the three new pickle ball courts on the so-called seashell parking lot on 35 South and 6th Avenue is being held up because of material shortages and an error in delivery of the light poles. Nevertheless, Ms. Maruca said she expects that 90 to 98 percent of the project will be completed between Labor Day and October. Mr. Amoruso said that the masonry, curbing and footings for the light posts have been completed. He and Mayor Hill pointed out that material shortages are affecting many industries.
- **Trash:** Ms. Maruca said the town is being more diligent about picking up the trash on the beaches. She said the town will likely go back to using trash cans with lids next year, so the gulls can't get into the cans, but that in the past people had just dropped the trash near the cans when they could not get it into the small opening in the lids.
- **LED sign in Seaside Heights:** Ms. Maruca said the brightness of the sign, which some Ortley residents have complained about, is affected by which advertisement is flashing. She said it has nothing to do with wattage, which is standard, so Seaside Heights is within its rights.
- **Trailer in the Third Avenue parking lot:** The trailer is used for beach and lifeguard equipment.
- **Beach staff parking:** Anthony asked why beach staff continue to park in the municipal lot when they were asked to park in the OCUA lot to free up space for beachgoers. Mr. Amoruso said he would mention it to Jared Tate, who oversees the beach.
- **Litter on dunes:** Ms. Maruca said residents should not venture onto the dunes to clear out trash and that staff is using longer sticks to try to reach it.

Mayor Hill:

- **Toms River Little League:** Mayor Hill said Toms River advanced to the Little League World Series games in Williamsport, PA., after winning a heart-stopper game Friday night. They were scheduled to play Saturday night but that game is just for seeding and would not affect their participation in the finals. He said the team is under some hardship due to COVID-19 restrictions. Mike Wymbbs suggested that the OBVTA send a \$300 donation to the team. The

motion was approved by the OBVTA board (and the amount was sustained in a brief board of directors meeting following the adjournment of the general membership meeting).

- **Veteran's Clinic:** Toms River was selected as the site for the new county veteran's clinic, a development that is a "home run" for the town, Mayor Hill said. The clinic, which will be built on Hooper Avenue, will be completed in 2023. It will provide more jobs and significantly more in tax income to the town, he said.
- **Downtown Redevelopment:** The plan to redevelop Toms River's downtown to draw more millennials, restaurants and other businesses to the area became highly contentious at the Council meeting this week, when residents turned out in force to protest the plan. Some of the criticisms included height/scale, loss of views, traffic, etc. Mayor Hill said part of the issue for residents had been the ill-advised decision by the Downtown Business Improvement District (BID) to cancel a public hearing that had been scheduled ahead of the Council's vote on the plan. Residents therefore did not have time to hear the plan in detail, ask questions or raise objections in advance of the town Council vote, he said. The Council's vote was thus tabled to the next meeting, and the BID was directed to schedule a meeting to give residents the opportunity to first review the plan and voice their concerns. Mayor Hill praised Anthony Colucci for staying for the entire three-hour township meeting, and also said the town planner, Dave Roberts, had made an excellent presentation. He touted the benefits of the plan and cited the enthusiasm of the former Community Hospital, now part of the RWJ Barnabas hospital system, for it, as it will provide housing for medical residents now that the facility has been transformed into a teaching hospital. The plan includes 285 apartments (15%, or 43 units, pledged for affordable housing), 400-plus parking spaces, eight-story structures that will have retail on ground level and apartments above, jitney service, a small amphitheater and other river and downtown amenities. Toni asked Mayor Hill what the community givebacks were for the variances and PILOT status provided by the Township. He said amnesties were provided at the building site only, ie the promenade, parking, etc. She said that typically in New Jersey developments like this, the development plans include community givebacks like funding for a public project such as a park or a homeless shelter. The mayor defended the decision to provide a 30-year tax abatement to the developer, saying the project will bring in other developments and ultimately result in a net tax gain for the township.
- **EMS & Fire Services to the barrier island and efficiency study:** Mayor Hill said that on his orders, starting July 1, the police had been keeping an EMS rig on the barrier island during the day shift. The arrangement is to last the summer season. He said he put a premium on saving lives and 20 minutes from the mainland to the island is too long. Anthony said we still would prefer that the town enter into a first responder agreement with Tri-Boro Rescue in Seaside, as that would also cover the island during nights and in the off-season and would ensure a quick response. He said the OBVTA will continue to monitor the response times in the wake of several recent disturbing incidents of slow response. Related to the emergency services, Anthony asked the status of the efficiency study commissioned by the township and due at the end of 2020. Mr. Amoruso said the study has been posted on the township website and that he would send the link. He said a lot of the study was administrative in nature and "not press release material," but many of the recommendations have already been implemented, producing thousands in savings. Mr. Amoruso said other recommendations were still under review, such as charging for parking on the oceanfront. Anthony said another 100 spots would soon become available with the purchase of the Surf Club property and that more spots would be created if the town put up "No Overnight Parking" signs rather than impose fees. Anthony asked if EMS improvements were covered in the study. Mr. Amoruso said they were. One recommendation was for Toms River to bump up its hourly rate of pay for part-time EMTs from \$16/hour to \$25/hour, and

doing so has already resulted in an increase in crew members. Toni Tomarazzo asked if the consolidation of fire districts was covered in the study. Mr. Amoruso said the town would support such an effort if the fire companies wanted to go in that direction. He said it would result in substantial savings. He said the town was insisting that all new labor contracts include the option of providing health care benefits through the state system, which would give Toms River leverage with private brokers to bring health care expenses down.

- **Beach erosion:** A member asked why there are no jetties to prevent beach erosion. Mr. Amoruso said the beach replenishment was an Army Corps of Engineers project and that jetties (now called groins) are no longer used. He said there is 50 feet of sand that was washed into the ocean and that there is not much that the town can do once the sand washes out. He said the Army Corps is expected back next year to reassess the Ortley beach situation and that more dredging and pumping is expected.
- **Tax revaluations:** The high cost of real estate now will have an impact on reassessments. What can be done to adjust for that and avoid thousands of appeals, as the township faced in the past? Mr. Amoruso said the revaluations are mandated. He said revaluation looks at true value and that the amount of taxes collected won't change overall but the balance of payments will change. He said the township has no control over rising property values in the wake of superstorm Sandy. Toni asked if the town is going to deal with the inequity created for barrier island residents when the town flipped the weight used in its valuations from house (improvement) to property. She said that led to much higher taxes for island homeowners compared to those on the mainland. She said it could result in another round of massive appeals from homeowners. Mr. Amoruso said that the town does not want a repeat of the past, primarily because any adjustments (refunds) are borne entirely by the town and not the other tax districts (school, county, open space). Toni again asked if the town has restored the ratio between improvements and land values. She said it is not the first time we've raised this. Mr. Amoruso said he would talk to the tax collector this week and arrange a conference call to address the issues that Toni had raised. He said it does no good to meet with the revaluation company as they are just collectors of information and don't do the revals or set tax rates. Toni asked Mr. Amoruso to go through Anthony but that the entire board would be happy to meet about the issue. Ms. Maruca said we should meet before the next meeting and then have the tax collector at the October meeting. Toni said she would put together questions for the tax collector and he would get back to the OBVTA with the answers.
- **Boardwalk railings:** A member asked about the rusted connectors on the boardwalk railings. Mr. Amoruso said the town is trying to replace the rails but can't get the materials yet. Anthony pointed out that there is a lot of rust on the garbage cans, as well, and Ms. Maruca said the town would be addressing that with new cans next year.

Lt. Bachonski:

- There has been a change in leadership in the top ranks of the TRPD due to the move of Deputy Chief Belcher to the Port Authority.
- He thanked Mayor Hill and Mr. Amoruso for increasing the rate for the part-time EMTs. "Without it we could not have staff on the island," he said. There are now six new part-time employees, with six more in the pipeline.
- **Fireworks:** Since July 1 there have been 13 fireworks calls, with eight of those calls on July 4th and five since (4 of those were deemed unfounded).
- **Juvenile groups:** Calls are down on juvenile complaints, with only six since July 1. He said there have been no incidents and that the younger officers on the force are monitoring TikTok and

Snapchat for postings about beach parties and are nipping them in the bud before calls for party goers are widely circulated.

- **Junior police camp:** 50 children attended. The camp culminated with a day on Ortley Beach.
- **National Night Out:** It was a big success, the best ever.
- **Bakin' Bagels:** Officers responded to a complaint that the sidewalk was impassable because of the large array of chairs, tables, signs, wooden boat and other structures blocking the sidewalk. The officers found the public garbage cans empty and no sidewalk blockage and no action was taken.
- **Beach Day:** Officers have been assigned to the Beach Day events to take place this evening.
- **Speeding on Washington Street:** Anthony expressed concern about speeding cars on Washington Street. A discussion ensued about whether the placing of stop signs at different locations would slow down drivers.

The town officials left the Zoom meeting at 11:05 p.m.

Streetscape Project: Joan Strathern

Joan reported on recent developments regarding a \$1 million federal grant (passed through the state and Toms River) to spend on improvements to the business strip on 35 North. NV5, the designer of the project, was given state approval of a preliminary plan, allowing them to advance to the final planning stage. NV 5 representatives, Town Planner Dave Roberts, Deputy Town Planner Robert Hudak, Joan and three other OBVTA board members – Paul Jeffrey, Cathy Crisafulli, and Mary Ann Giordano Wallis, met recently and walked the stretch of road to review the plan. Some revisions were made. NV 5 will now prepare the final plan. There will be a public meeting to review the plan and outreach to the businesses along the strip. The hope is that by January the project would be able to go out for bid, a contract awarded in February, the work to take place in the spring and the project to be completed in time for the summer 2022 season.

BOD member comments:

Mike asked if the suggested \$300 contribution to Toms River Little League were enough. Anthony said it would be discussed by the BOD following the adjournment of the membership meeting.

Paul thanked Joan for her hard work in pulling the Streetscape project together, pointing out that her efforts have spanned about five years since it was initiated as part of the recovery from superstorm Sandy.

Member comments:

None

Anthony said an email would be sent out later in the day updating whether the plans for Beach Day would proceed, given a prediction of rain. He thanked the members for a very good meeting.

Motion to adjourn (Joan, Mike). Approved.

Meeting was adjourned at 11:09 a.m.

