

From the Desk of Mayor Coffey

July / August 2020

The advent of the COVID-19 virus brought about a global game of “sink or swim” and Oceanport has been a “swimmer” throughout this entire crisis. Notwithstanding state imposed social distancing regulations, stay at home orders, and work from home directives, our municipal government has continued to operate without missing a beat while employing protocols designed to protect both our municipal employees and citizens. Our parks and recreational facilities have remained open (with the exception of playgrounds for a while), subject to social distancing practices and Oceanport was one of the first communities in New Jersey to use technology to conduct virtual council, school and planning board meetings that allow for members of the public to not only watch, but participate in the meetings in real time. We are excited to see homes rising up and out of the soil at site of our old Municipal Complex at the corner of Myrtle and Monmouth, and our new Municipal Complex on the old Fort Monmouth property is moving along quickly. We now expect to be in the new Police Building by September and the Clement V. Sommers Municipal Building should be ready to occupy by December.

While we were able to pass our 2020 municipal budget on June 25th, we were required to send out **estimated** third quarter property tax bills. Estimated 3rd quarter tax bills are not the norm for Oceanport, but the State of New Jersey will not be finalizing its budget until September because of COVID-19 and the applicable laws required our Tax Collector to send out estimated bills. The estimated 3rd quarter bill needs to be paid by August 1, 2020. This is NOT an additional tax bill, it's just an estimated bill. After the State completes its budget, we will reconcile everybody's 2020 real property taxes when we issue a final 4th quarter bill in the fall. For a more complete explanation about the estimated 3rd quarter tax bill, please visit the Borough of Oceanport's website and read “COVID-19 Update No. 16.”

Our road improvement program continues unabated and portions of Turf, Genesse, Blackberry, Comanche, Winhar, Werah, Ithaca, Mohawk, Allenhurst, Avon and Myrtle are all scheduled for work before the end of the year. We have a new, albeit much more expensive, garbage and recycling contract with the same provider (Roselle), the only significant change to which is that the Borough's Department of Public Works has taken over the duty of providing bulk trash pickup effective as of June 1, 2020. To schedule a bulk trash pickup, please e-mail publicworks@oceanportboro.com or call (848) 456-4668. Email is the preferred method and we ask you include your name, address, and a brief description of the items being picked up. Please visit the Borough's website to see what constitutes bulk trash and see the article on page 2 for more information.

While we had to cancel our annual Summer Action Camp due to COVID-19 restrictions imposed by the New Jersey Department of Health, our youth and adult recreational sports programs have re-started (with certain restrictions) and our Recreation Committee has arranged for COVID-19

compliant youth sports camps at Blackberry Bay Park From 7/13 to 7/17 and 7/20 to 7/24 through the U.S. Sports Institute and a COVID-19 compliant Marine Science Camp from 8/24 to 8/28. More information on these camps can be gotten from the Recreation Committee's section of the Borough's website.

We are looking for more participation at our municipal council meetings. We meet once a month during the summer and twice a month for most of the rest of the year. While I will admit that our meetings are about as exciting as watching Mike MacStudy umpire, the Borough would benefit greatly from more involvement, input and comment from the general public during these meetings. The irony of the COVID-19 lockdown is that it is actually easier than ever to watch and/or participate in a municipal council because you don't even to leave your home. You can now watch meetings live on FIOS Channel 28 and, once you've registered on the Borough's website, you can both watch and participate in meetings on your computer or smartphone. We've also made past meetings of the Borough Council available for viewing from the Borough's website. Please, please, please visit the Borough's website and register to watch and participate in our upcoming meetings. If you have FIOS, you can also turn to channel 28 to see important updates regarding our town.

None of this would have been possible, however, if Oceanport as a community had not responded to this crisis with such grace, reason, and intelligence. We've spent the last 90 days deluged by conflicting, contradictory and confusing information from virologists, immunologists, epidemiologists, the CDC, county departments of health, state departments of health, international health organizations, CNN, FOX, MSNBC, elected officials, appointed officials and even people who just look official and the only thing one can conclude from all this is that uncertainty is the only certainty when it comes to COVID-19. The COVID-19 virus has been making decisions for us for several months, but we are at the point where people are making decisions for themselves as to how they are going to deal with the COVID-19 threat going forward. Over the past 90 days, we have had to develop our views on masks, social distancing, handshakes, work, hugs, supermarkets, sports, kids, school, parties, outdoor gatherings, indoor gatherings, et cetera. The problem we have is that not everyone has the same approach or the same level of comfortability. This plays out most notably when we meet someone on the street or at the store and we start doing the "chicken dance" with our elbows, hands and feet trying to figure out how to properly greet each other.

On a national level, the next 90 days are probably going to be more difficult than the past 90 days because of the disparity in how each state is dealing with the crisis and how the COVID-19 virus is spreading. On a local level, it doesn't have to be that way. We are a small, close-knit community. If we remain considerate of each other, if we keep communicating with each other and if we continue to take care of each other, Oceanport can weather this storm no matter how long it goes on. With a little luck, we'll get to enjoy the next few months of summer before we have to figure out how to deal with all the social distancing protocols that will be put in place for the school year. The track is partially open, Oceanport's parks and recreation facilities are fully open, the Shrewsbury River is cleaner than it has been in years and our restaurants now have some outside seating. Get out and enjoy what Oceanport has to offer but remember that we need to respect the needs and concerns of others as we do. Whether you want to wear a mask or not,

whether you want to socially distance or not, if you are out and about in Oceanport, the Buddy Brocklebank rule is in effect: do the right thing for others and they will do the right thing by you. It's that simple.