

Roxbury Council Meeting  
Community Update  
June 9, 2020

- Welcome and thank you for joining us. We hope you are all well and safe.
- Tonight, I would like to use this update on Roxbury's status and response to the COVID-19 pandemic to also address the tragic injustice and civil unrest occurring around the country and closer to home.
- As a Roxbury resident for 25 years, I know we live in a community that values diversity and respect for each other. And, I know that we have all been deeply touched by the disturbing events in Minneapolis and elsewhere.
- First, our COVID-19 status report. I am pleased to say that we have now had several weeks of little to no increase in the number of confirmed corona virus cases in Roxbury. The number of cases stands at 281.
- Tragically, there has been one additional death.
- The few new cases and one new death are directly related to people in a long-term care facility.
- What does that mean? It means the trend is no community spread in Roxbury.
- While I doubt any of us will ever forget the people afflicted and those we lost during this pandemic – especially our most vulnerable residents in long-term care facilities and nursing homes -- it feels very good to be able to report that we may have turned the corner on the virus.
- I attribute this moment to the efforts our community made to adhere to the social distancing requirements and to help those among us who were

most vulnerable to the virus. Again, I want to thank our health care workers -- especially at Merry Heart -- essential employees, and first responders for their dedication and service during this difficult time.

- Great news, yes. But by all accounts, we are not quite through this pandemic.
- Even as the governor lifts some restrictions, it remains vitally important for us to continue to practice social distancing to avoid a recurrence of the virus.
- With that, I regret that we have decided to cancel the township's summer-camp program for this season. This was a very difficult decision because we know how important the camps are to our families.
- Township staff, led by Township Manager John Shepherd, have determined it would be nearly impossible to maintain social distancing with the young participants and counsellors and we were concerned for their safety.
- We also made this decision in conjunction with the school district, which has decided not to allow use of school buildings during the summer. They need to do this so they can prepare for the possibility of reopening schools in September. While that decision has not been made, it certainly seems prudent to keep the buildings clean.
- Now, for some good news. Based on the new guidelines issued by the governor, Township Manager Shepherd and staff have recommended a limited opening of our playing fields to resume some youth sports programs by June 27<sup>th</sup>.
- The only sports that will be permitted are non-contact such as baseball and softball and possibly some other practicing with social distancing in place.

The specific sports and the guidelines for resuming these activities are being developed by staff and will be announced.

- I know this comes as a welcome development and it is another sure sign things are improving -- cautiously.
- Also, because of recent guidelines announced by the governor, we are pleased to announce that we will be able to open Horse Shoe Lake Beach.
- The Township Manager and staff, as well as the Township's Recreation Advisory Commission, are recommending a plan to open the lake on June 27, at 11 a.m.
- We will be following guidelines from the Governor's Executive Order and limiting the beach capacity to 280 patrons. The capacity was determined using guidelines set forth by the CDC and New Jersey Parks and Recreation Association Aquatics Division.
- I want to thank the Recreation Advisory Commission as well as staff for working hard to get the lake opened.
- For the 2020 season, the plan is to only offer daily passes, rather than season passes, for the beach. This decision has been made to allow as many Roxbury residents an opportunity to visit the beach since the daily capacity will be capped at 280 patrons. Daily passes will be available for sale the day prior via Community Pass. Please visit the Township's website or contact the Recreation Department staff via telephone or e-mail for additional information.
- We are also considering another important resolution tonight that would allow our local restaurants to partially reopen. If adopted tonight, this resolution will permit restaurants to re-open with outdoor seating as of

June 15<sup>th</sup>. The Township has designed a process that will permit restaurants to offer outdoor seating, in addition to carry-out and delivery, so that these restaurants, an important part of the local economy, will be one step closer to normal operations.

- Meanwhile, we were also encouraged by the governor's recent modified reopening of many businesses – including restaurants. Our township staff are reviewing those orders and requirements and will be helping our businesses with understanding compliance and safety issues.
- Let me now turn to the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis, the arrest of four police officers in connection with the incident, as well as the violence that followed. The actions that many of us witnessed were deplorable and have been widely condemned – including by respected law enforcement and community leaders.
- The incident has led to a national call for an end to injustice.
- Unfortunately, it also sparked incidents of violence and looting. In response, many in our nation have called for calm, peaceful protest, and unity.
- In our community, the Roxbury Interfaith Council is planning a Virtual Interfaith Gathering of Solidarity on Monday, June 15, at 7:30 p.m.
- Everyone in the community is invited to participate. Information about the event can be found on the Township's website.
- I'd like to thank the Interfaith Council, especially Rabbi Enna of Temple Shalom and Reverend Carrie Morgan of the First Presbyterian Church in Succasunna for putting this event together. I'd also like to thank Roxbury Library Director Radwa Ali for her help in arranging the Zoom session.

- I'd to share something that recently happened in Roxbury and was reported in TAP into Roxbury. My hat off to the author. I want to thank TAP Into Roxbury for publishing this story, which shows you the kind of community we live in.
- According to the TAP story, Monique Ferguson, of Wharton, warned her son and husband they really shouldn't be out on the Landing Park athletic field to practice the boy's football throws.
- It was Saturday. The weather was beautiful. But the field was closed.
- Justin, 16, is the varsity quarterback at his high school in New York City, and he needed a place to throw some long spirals to his dad. Father and son took a chance.
- Then the Roxbury police car appeared. The officer inside was white. The Fergusons are black.
- Inside the patrol car, Roxbury Police Patrolman Steven Strowbridge watched the father and son for a while before getting out and coming over. Ferguson said she wasn't sure what was going to take place.
- What happened inspired her to later send a photo and message to the Roxbury Police Department praising Strowbridge and the way he handled the matter.
- "I did that because it could have gone a completely different way, especially because we're all on edge right now with what's going on in this country," Ferguson said.

- She said Strowbridge initially didn't even mention the fact that the field was closed. He talked football and athletics, she said.
- "He approached my husband, and they had a nice little conversation," said Ferguson. "They started talking about going to the gym and working out and about Justin and what position he plays. The officer shared with us that he also was into football."
- Strowbridge gently reminded the father and son that they weren't supposed to be on the field, thanks to COVID-19 and social distancing. But that was a tiny part of the interaction, said Ferguson.
- "They ended up talking 45 minutes to an hour, she said. "They just showed their mutual enthusiasm for football and working out, the challenges of not being able to go to the gym and what the officer was doing to keep in shape."
- On its Facebook page, the police department posted a photo of Strowbridge and Justin smiling and holding opposite ends of a football. They said the message from Ferguson was "uplifting," and they noted that "Justin is a pretty good QB."
- Ferguson said police asked permission to post the photo. "I just said go ahead and share it," she said. "At this time, everybody is so at odds with each other. Frankly, we believe there are good and bad in every group of people."

- She also noted the police told her the Fergusons should call the department the next time Justin is around and wants to practice. “They said, ‘Reach out. A lot of the officers here would love to have the opportunity to throw the ball around with him,’” she said.
- Thank you, Ms. Ferguson. And thank you, Officer Strowbridge.
- Much needs to be done to correct social injustice in this country. On this, nearly everyone agrees. But for a moment in Roxbury, our town and police showed everyone what happens when everyone works together to respect each other.
- Finally, June 24<sup>th</sup> is last day of school for students in Roxbury. And, Friday June 19<sup>th</sup>, is Roxbury High School’s virtual graduation -- although, recent changes announced by the governor today may make it possible for some outdoor graduation ceremonies in July. We stand ready to assist in any way we can.
- I’d like to take a moment to address this year’s Roxbury High School’s amazing, creative, and resilient graduating seniors. You have certainly endured a lot in your last year in high school.
- It has undoubtedly been a challenging and confusing time. You lost a lot when your senior year in school ended abruptly, robbing you of those memories.
- Through it all, we have been pleased to watch you demonstrated your ability to adapt, innovate, and soldier through. You traded senior parties

for helping out in the community. And through it all, you maintained your sense of purpose and humor.

- That said, the only thing that would be worse than the sadness and tragedy that has marked your final year in high school would be to waste the opportunity to learn from these events.
- The experience you gained during these difficult times has prepared you to leave high school better equipped to meet the challenges you will face as the leaders of the future. You have demonstrated your ability to use your experience to make things better.
- On behalf of the Township Council and staff, please accept our congratulations and best wishes to the Class of 2020 for reaching this important milestone and in all your future endeavors.
- Also, please join me in thanking and congratulating the parents, teachers, and other adults who have helped shape these young people -- because, as we all know, amazing young people don't just happen.
- Thank you.

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