

Community Update

July 27, 2021

- Welcome to tonight's meeting of the Township Council. I am Mayor Bob DeFillippo and on behalf of the Township Council, I hope you are all well, safe and enjoying the nice summer weather.
- Tonight, I am sorry to report that our Covid numbers are going in the wrong direction. The number of confirmed Covid cases in Roxbury has started to climb again. Since our last meeting on July 13, the number of confirmed Covid cases went from 2,560 to 2,596 – that is 36 new cases in two weeks.
- Considering that we only had seven new cases during the previous two weeks, the jump is alarming. We should all be concerned that we could be experiencing the surge taking place around the country, which is largely attributed to people who have not been vaccinated.
- As we have in the past, we consulted our Township Public Health Nurse Jim Craig, who has been at the forefront of Roxbury's response to Covid since the beginning of the pandemic. We thank him again for his dedication.
- According to Jim, Morris County is also experiencing a dramatic increase in daily cases. The average case count for our township is about the same as the number of cases being reported by the County for the same period.
- During Jim's interviews with people who contracted Covid or who have come in contact with someone who has, we discovered that a fair percentage of the positive cases are persons that are returning from travel to areas that have high numbers of Covid cases.
- He also noted that children in Roxbury who are testing positive have not been vaccinated because they are under the age of 12 and not eligible.

- Unfortunately, we are seeing some breakthrough cases, where persons that are fully vaccinated are testing positive for the virus. Jim reminds us that the vaccine is not 100 percent effective. For every 100 individuals exposed to the virus, we can expect a handful of breakthrough cases. For example, he explained, if the vaccine is 85 to 90 percent effective against any particular variant, we can expect to see 10 to 15 positive cases out of every 100 persons who are exposed and who have been vaccinated.
- Finally, and most troubling, Jim said Roxbury is seeing an increase in the number of cases of the highly contagious Delta variant.
- All of this should tell us that we are not out of the woods yet. We need to continue to be careful. Having the ability to be with family and friends in large and small groups has been a blessing. It would be terrible if we had to go back to the days when we were told to stay home and to avoid contact with others.
- We need to be smart, and we need to take precautions when they are necessary. We urge everyone to follow CDC, state, and local health safety guidance, and to help protect those in our community who are most vulnerable – our young and our frail elderly.
- No one wants to go back. Please get vaccinated.

Berkshire Valley Road

- At our last meeting, I told you that Morris County planned to close Berkshire Valley Road for a month from Hercules Road to North Dell Avenue in Kenvil to repair significant damage caused by a dump truck that hit the railroad bridge because the truck was too tall.

- This Council, led by Councilman Jim Rilee, was swift and clear – there was no way Berkshire Valley Road could be closed for that long. It would have placed a heavy burden on our Berkshire Valley residents, making it nearly impossible for them to get in and out of their community.
- Township Manager John Shepherd was instructed to contact the County to express our concerns.
- Today I have good news to report – a reminder that sometimes government can act quickly. County Administrator John Bonanni heard our concerns and following a meeting between the county’s and Roxbury’s professionals, the road was reopened in days, not months. A plan was devised that resulted in the repairs being accelerated.
- I want to thank John Bonanni, his staff, as well as John Shepherd and his staff, for working together to solve this problem for residents. I would also like to thank Councilman Jim Rilee for reminding us that you can fight city hall – and sometimes, you can also win.

The Shops at Ledgewood Commons

- Last Tuesday, July 20, it was my honor to represent the Township Council at the ribbon-cutting event for the new Shops at Ledgewood Commons -- a modern shopping center that stands where once stood a derelict mall – an ugly blight on our community.
- Few people will every truly understand how much work it took to build a project like this in the middle of a pandemic, at a time when no one was investing in brick-and-mortar shopping centers, and when retailers were closing not expanding outlets.

- It wasn't always easy or smooth, but working with our developer partners, we were able to transform that blight into a vibrant new shopping center that will act like an economic engine for Roxbury.
- There are so many in the township who helped. From this Council to our police department, engineering, and fire officials to our Public Works Department. Our township was involved in every aspect of construction.
- A special thank you to the volunteer members of the Township's Planning Board, led by Chairman Charlie Bautz, who put in many nights and long hours reviewing the massive and complex project.
- And none of this could have happened without the expertise and dedication of our professional staff, led by Township Manager John Shepherd. Special thanks go to Township Planner Russ Stern, Planning Board Attorney Tom Germinario, and Engineer Paul Ferriero.
- At each step of this long journey, the interests of Roxbury's residents and businesses were always front and center.
- Today, because of sound leadership, Roxbury enjoys a healthy and rapidly growing business community and a vital and thriving local economy that benefits all our residents and businesses.

Upcoming Events

- I will end by mentioning we have several fun and fantastic community events coming up – the St. Therese Carnival and our annual Community Fireworks. I will leave it to my fellow Council members to give you more details about those great summer family activities.

- With that, I thank you again for attending tonight's meeting, especially those who took the time to join us in person. I know I speak for the Council when I say it still feels good to meet in person after such a long absence.
- Please stay well and be safe. Now, back to our agenda.

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