

October 18, 2021

Note: This meeting was in a hybrid format, with limited seating in the Council Chambers supplemented by teleconference for the public who could not attend.

Minutes of the public meeting of the Mayor and Council of the Borough of Dunellen held on October 18, 2021.

Mayor Jason F. Cilento called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. and he led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Municipal Clerk William Robins read the Sunshine Statement and called the Roll.

Present: Jason Cilento, April Burke, Jessica Dunne, Richard Pinder, Trina Rios, and Daniel Sigmon

At this point, Mayor Cilento made a statement regarding the Dunellen Fire Department:

I would like to take this moment to recognize the strength of the Dunellen Fire Department and the men and women who serve it. On October 12th, they suffered great loss to their fire house, equipment, and apparatuses. But it did not break their spirits and strength to persevere through this tragedy. The Borough is still assessing the damage and an investigation is being conducted by the Middlesex County Fire Marshall's Office to determine the cause of the fire. Thankfully, there have been no reported injuries to those involved in fighting today's fire. We are all thankful to the members of the Dunellen Fire Department, Dunellen Police Department, the Dunellen Rescue Squad, Dunellen OEM, and all the first responders from the surrounding communities who assisted as mutual aid. Over the next several weeks, as we continue our assessment and restore the Fire House and everything in it, the Borough of Dunellen will be covered by mutual aid from neighboring departments, and this will ensure the safety and protection of our residents and businesses should another incident occur in the borough. We are a strong community but our friendships and partnerships with our neighbors make us even stronger. We thank them for that. We will do everything in our power to return the volunteers of the Dunellen Fire Department back to their rightful home at 231 South Madison Avenue. These men and women have given so much to our community and we are here to support them. As I noted in a statement on October 12th, what stood out to me was the image of the American Flag standing untouched inside the smoke damaged bay of the Fire House. At that moment, it signified not just a national symbol for our country, but the strength and determination of our men and women who serve and protect us. We are Dunellen Strong, and we will come back from this, and we will be stronger from this. We are the Miracle Mile and the Miracle Mile Means Community.

On the motion of Mr. Sigmon and seconded by Mrs. Rios it was moved to accept the Minutes of the Meeting of October 4, 2021.

Mayor Cilento noted that the original draft of the Minutes characterized the comments from the public as being "accusatory and angry." He suggested that it be redefined as "concerned." This was approved by Council.

Yes: Burke, Dunne, Pinder, Rios and Sigmon

On the motion of Dr. Dunne and seconded by Mr. Pinder it was moved to accept the following:

10-18-2021: #1

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE GOVERNING BODY OF THE BOROUGH OF DUNELLEN, NEW JERSEY, THAT:

The bills, as per the attached list, are hereby authorized for payment.

Yes: Burke, Dunne, Pinder, Rios and Sigmon

On the motion of Mrs. Burke and seconded by Mr. Sigmon it was moved to accept the following:

10-18-2021: #2

WHEREAS, the Tax Collector has determined sewer charges for 125 NORTH AVENUE under Block 86 Lot 5 from 2018 were never cancelled from this block and lot and moved to the new Block 86 Lot 5.02 Qual - C0005, and

WHEREAS, the charges remained on the old account to present

NOW, THEREFORE: BE IT RESOLVED BY THE BOROUGH COUNCIL OF THE BOROUGH OF Dunellen;

That the proper municipal officers be and they are hereby authorized to cancel 1st and 2nd half 2018 sewer charges as follows:

Block	Lot	Name	Amount
86	5	Jonathan Stirberg/Valstir 125 North Avenue No Refund Required:	\$2004.00

Yes: Burke, Dunne, Pinder, Rios and Sigmon

On the motion of Mrs. Rios and seconded by Mr. Pinder it was moved to accept the following:

10-18-2021: #3

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE GOVERNING BODY OF THE BOROUGH OF DUNELLEN, NEW JERSEY, THAT:

WHEREAS, NJSA 40A:4-87 provides that the Director of the Division of Local Government Services may approve the insertion of any special item of revenue in the budget of any county or municipality when such item shall have been made available by law and the amount thereof was not determined at the time of the adoption of the budget, and

WHEREAS, said Director may also approve the insertion of an item of appropriation for an equal amount, and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Municipal Council of the Borough of Dunellen in the County of Middlesex, New Jersey, hereby requests the Director of the Division of Local Government Services to approve the insertion of an item of revenue in the budget of Calendar Year 2022 in the sum of \$5,914.00, which is now available from the Middlesex County Municipal Alliance Leadership Grant, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the like sum of \$5,914.00 is hereby appropriated under the caption Middlesex County Municipal Alliance Leadership Grant, with \$1,478.50 in local cash-matching funds for a total of \$7,392.50.

Yes: Burke, Dunne, Pinder, Rios and Sigmon

On the motion of Mr. Pinder and seconded by Mrs. Rios it was moved to accept the following:

10-18-2021: #4

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE GOVERNING BODY OF THE BOROUGH OF DUNELLEN, NEW JERSEY, THAT:

Mary McLaughlin and Michelle Quetel are hereby hired as Substitute School Crossing Guards, effective October 18, 2021, at an hourly salary of \$12.00. This is a position without benefits.

Yes: Burke, Dunne, Pinder, Rios and Sigmon

On the motion of Dr. Dunne and seconded by Mr. Sigmon it was moved to accept the following:

10-18-2021: #5

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE GOVERNING BODY OF THE BOROUGH OF DUNELLEN, NEW JERSEY, THAT:

Mayor Jason F. Cilento is authorized to form the Mayor's Cannabis Task Force whose duties will be to review New Jersey State laws and regulations on cannabis and the status of legalization, and evaluate the impact it may have on the Borough of Dunellen. The Task Force will report to the Mayor and Council in 2022 and may consist of residents, business owners, civic leaders, and Borough Officials.

Mrs. Burke asked about a timeline. Mayor Cilento responded that this resolution creates the framework, and the goal is a report in Summer 2022. Hopefully, the State will have full guidance and regulations and we can have a better understanding of the impact on other towns. The taskforce would have no more than nine members: Council officials, Planning Board, residents with opposing views, business owners and civic leaders in the community. This would allow for a comprehensive approach to the issue.

Yes: Burke, Dunne, Pinder, Rios and Sigmon

On the motion of Dr. Dunne and seconded by Mrs. Rios it was moved to accept the following:

10-18-2021: #6

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE GOVERNING BODY OF THE BOROUGH OF DUNELLEN, NEW JERSEY, THAT:

WHEREAS, Tremayne Reid resigned his position as Councilperson for the Borough of Dunellen on October 4, 2021; and

WHEREAS, the Democratic Municipal Committee has presented to the Dunellen Borough Council the names of three eligible persons to fill the vacancy; and

WHEREAS, the three persons are: Heather Anderson, Nikesh Patel and Harold Vandermark; and

WHEREAS, by motion and second, Harold Vandermark has been presented to the Council for nomination and Council vote.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, by the Mayor and Council of the Borough of Dunellen, that Harold Vandermark be selected to fill the vacancy of the Council seat held by Tremayne Reid, said term to expire on December 31, 2022, with the intervening General Election to be held on November 8, 2022 to select a candidate to fill the remaining term of Tremayne Reid that would have expired on December 31, 2023.

Yes: Burke, Dunne, Pinder, Rios and Sigmon

Municipal Attorney John E. Bruder administered the Oath of Office to Mr. Vandermark.

COUNCIL DISCUSSION

Municipal Employee/Police Parking Lot Fence

Police Chief Daniel Smith introduced Anthony Mitlo, a supporter of the Department and Dunellen. Funds for the fence might come from forfeitures. An argument for a fence around the lot is for the security of both Police vehicles and personal vehicles of police and municipal employees. Currently, there is no fencing, and anyone can simply walk across the lot from North Avenue or Prospect Avenue to the Train Station. Mr. Mitlo brought in samples of fencing materials and explained how they were durable and with photographs of similar fencing showed how they were attractive. The fence would be about four feet high and have one or two entrances, with an open driveway off Prospect Avenue, and maybe a gate onto North Avenue, dependent upon further discussion. He suggests going with the industrial kind rather than the commercial kind to account for possible damage from snow plowing. Installation would take only a few days.

The Council concurred in giving the Police Department permission to pursue fencing.

Reports:

Mr. Vandermark: no report.

Mrs. Rios: 1) the Library will have a Trustee Meeting on Thursday, October 21st at 7:00 pm; 2) the Library welcomed its newest librarian, Karen, at the HarvestFest 2021; 3) the Library will have teen programs on Mondays and Fridays as well as children's programs and ESL at various times. There will be a webinar on falling and brain damage prevention. Information can be found on the Library's web page; 4) the Library will also have a pumpkin painting program as well as a craft program; 5) the Dunellen Arts and Culture Commission is having a Halloween House Decorating Contest. Please see the Facebook page for more information; 6) thank you to the Dunellen Downtown Management Organization and all those who stuck it out in the rain at the HarvestFest 2021 last weekend; 7) there are new string lights on the downtown light poles; 8) thank you to all the people and businesses who made the Pop-Up Park possible.

Mrs. Burke: 1) next edition of *The Dunellen Report* will be out soon. Please submit copy for the January edition by December 15th. Reach out to department heads and provide information on future events; 2) OEM continues with its CERT training. Anyone interested please contact Homer

Mosley; 3) for the Police Department, in September, there were sixteen arrests, 226 motor vehicle stops, 269 summonses issued and three borough ordinance citations; 4) we are looking into alternatives for crossing guard recruitment and administration; 5) asked about the system for Volunteer forms and inquiries. Dr. Robins responded that all emails received from the contact the borough form on the web site are referred to departments, the mayor, or to other appropriate borough officials, or that he responds directly to the inquirer.

Dr. Dunne: 1) expressed concern regarding the Fire House fire and she is available to assist so just reach out and her thoughts are with the Fire Department and its members; 2) the Finance Committee will be meeting on Wednesday to go over a number of issues; 3) we are good with the Asset Inventory list and she is seeking comments on Stimulus funds use; 4) the Green Brook Flood Control Commission meeting was two week ago. The Tropical Storm Ida damaged properties on North Washington Avenue are not part of the buy-out. There are other opportunities through the Blue Acres program; 5) please send high water mark pictures to Dr. Robins; 6) for the Diversity and Inclusion Committee: we had a booth at HarvestFest 2021. Next month is Native American Heritage Month and there have been discussions with the PTO on a movie. PTO has offered \$140 toward the cost, though more funding is needed (\$300.00) for the movie license and a moderator fee. Question to Council: can D&I use funds from other committees to pay for this event? Mrs. Rios noted there were some unanswered questions from the PTO. Dr. Dunne is still gathering information on the logistics. Mayor Cilento inquired about the promotional efforts being undertaken so that people will attend. Dr. Dunne responded that they are open to different means including Facebook as the program would be open to everyone, not just the schools. Mayor Cilento expressed concern that the Committee went to the PTO without first obtaining Council consent and suggested that in the future the Council first be consulted before asking another organization for funding assistance. Mrs. Rios noted that the Democratic Committee is sponsoring the Veteran's event and she thought it was a D&I event. There was back and forth between Mrs. Rios, Mrs. Burke, and Dr. Dunne on the matter of this program and communication on sponsorship. Dr. Dunne stated that there was an opportunity for different organizations to cross-promote an event, not to sponsor it. Mayor Cilento brought the discussion back to the central question; does the Council think this is the best use of \$300.00? For example, another use would be as part of the capital down-payment for the digital sign in Washington Park. Mr. Vandermark suggested the monies come from DACC, though they do not have a meeting until next month. Mayor Cilento asked if there should be a motion that the D&I Committee approach DACC for funding? Dr. Dunne noted that the Committee will be considering other heritage months. Mrs. Burke stated that she thought it a good idea if committees support each other. Mrs. Rios noted that answers to specific time and place questions ought to be provided before approaching DACC; 7) she was approached by a resident about creating a community garden. Do we have any restrictions? No. She will speak again to the resident to gather more information on the concept; 8) the issue of speeding continues. She asked Chief Smith about speed meters as their presence does reduce speeding. Is there an opportunity to purchase more? Yes, as part of a capital expenditure.

Mr. Sigmon: 1) no report on Recreation; 2) the Social Media Committee has had some productive conversations and he expects the Committee will be bringing ideas to the Council in the near future.

Mr. Pinder: Department of Public Works:

On Tuesday October 12th, the DPW crew finished two rounds of cleaning up water damage debris from our residents. We had 519 pick-ups and gathered approximately 300 tons of debris. We caught up on branch pick up throughout the town. Residents can always bring branches/tree limbs down to the DPW yard all year round.

We are now in leaf bag pick up time, and this will continue through December.

2) there was a Board of Education meeting on October 12th. Breakfast and lunch are being offered to all students free of charge. Next meeting will be October 26th.

Mayor Cilento:

Covid-19 Update:

Since my last report on 10/4/2021, we have been made aware of seventeen more new cases added to Dunellen's cumulative total of 950, which averages 1.2 cases per day. Dunellen's cumulative death total remains at fourteen.

Dunellen Vaccination Statistics Based on State of New Jersey Information Hub:

At Least One Dose
Dunellen Borough
Middlesex County

All Ages:	65%
12 through 17:	62%
12 and over:	76%
18 and over:	77%
30 and over:	78%
65 and over:	87%

Vaccine Courses Complete
Dunellen Borough
Middlesex County

All Ages:	59%
12 through 17:	54%
12 and over:	69%
18 and over:	70%
30 and over:	72%
65 and over:	83%

Dunellen Vaccination Numbers from Middlesex County as of 10/11/2021:

Adult Population People with at Least on Dose: 4,839

Adult Population with Dose 1 – Moderna + Pfizer: 4,470

Adult Population with Dose 2 – Moderna + Pfizer: 4,006

Adult Population with Janssen Dose: 369

Dunellen and Middlesex County's cumulative totals can be found at www.discovermiddlesex.com/total-cumulative-cases/

New Jersey COVID-19 Information Hub at: www.covid19.nj.gov.

If you are in need of assistance due to a mental health crisis because of the impact of COVID-19, please text the crisis line by texting "NJ" to 741741, call the family helpline at 1-800-843-5437 or call the mental health line at 1-866-202-4357.

DMV Mobile Unit:

Thank you to Assemblywoman Linda Carter's office, especially Geoff Smith, for helping coordinate a mobile DMV Unit on October 13th at the Dunellen Train Station. It was a successful event providing residents the opportunity to access the DMV locally and not have to stand in long lines at the DMV. I look forward to coordinating future mobile units with the Assemblywoman's office in the future.

South Washington (NJAW):

South Washington Avenue between North Avenue and Walnut Street will be closed on Wednesday 10/20 between 8am and 4pm. Residents that live in the area that is closed will be able to get to their homes, people will also be able to get to Columbia Park.

Road and Capital Improvement Projects:

The 30 new ADA sidewalks along the roads that will be mill & paved in November have been completed. Madison Avenue from North Avenue to South Avenue. South Avenue from Grove Street to Middlesex Border, High Street, and Lehigh Street.

NJAW has changed their plan for work on the north side of town, we will have an update on the streets soon. NJAW will be installing new water mains, updating new services for residents, along with new fire hydrants.

PSE&G expects to be done with the Lehigh & High Street section by next week. We have a meeting with PSE&G to discuss gas mains upgrades on the North Side of town on 10/19/2021. Report to be forthcoming to Council.

Flashing Pedestrian Crossing Signs completed and operational at South Madison and Walnut Street.

Mayors Alliance for Clean Green Brook Waterway: Taking place on October 23rd along with the mayors, town officials, and volunteers from Bound Brook, Green Brook, Middlesex, Dunellen, Plainfield, and Scotch Plains, alongside the Lower Raritan Watershed Partnership (LRWP).

Dunellen Station Redevelopment: Water main and curb work are being constructed. On-site pump station construction continues. North Washington pump station modifications continue. Townhome phase scheduled to commence in two to three weeks.

Dunellen Mural Community Presentation and Outreach:

The Rutgers Bloustein School and Mason Gross School of the Arts Mural Study program on Dunellen will be coming to Dunellen on October 28th at 7PM at the Senior Center in Columbia Park for a presentation and outreach program regarding murals and our community's reaction to them for the FA21 class. We will release promotional material on the Borough website and social media when it becomes available.

I have been thinking about ways in which we as a Borough Council and as a community could come together in support of the Fire Department. If the Council agrees, I feel we should initiate a Dine-Out for the FD in Dunellen, should restaurants want to participate, and allow for a percentage of sales to go back to the Fire Department. It would be great if we could also consider arranging for entertainment at some of our local venues to help get more people out to support. If Council would agree to this, I feel this is something we can endorse, and also ask for the DDMO to assist in helping us promote. Various ideas regarding the logistics of such a program were discussed. Jeff Best, 401 Madison Avenue, suggested Applebee's in Piscataway.

Mark Crawford, Dunellen Fire Chief: last Tuesday there was a fire at the Fire House, the cause of which is still under investigation. Numerous agencies responded. There was damage to the building and vehicles. We are being covered by Middlesex and Green Brook Fire Departments. The gear has been sent out for cleaning. They are looking to obtain loaner radios so our members can report directly to a scene. They have evaluated several recovery companies for rehabilitation and repair. Truck Two is cleaned and serviceable. Truck One is a total loss. Engine Two, Engine Three and Fire Rescue: we have recommendations from the Insurance Adjustor. Engine Two and Engine Three will have to go out for complete disassembly and refurbishment. They are in discussion regarding Fire Rescue and whether it will be considered a total loss due to its age. The vehicles will be off-line for at least a year, and they are considering their options.

Sue Connelly, President of the Fire Company: partnered on Sunday with Sweet Dreams on a car show. It was a spectacular turnout. Real demonstration of generosity.

Public Comment

Lauren Colletti: 628 Front Street, thanked Mayor Cilento and Mrs. Rios for their comments during the last Council meeting regarding the actions of the Council President. She would like to ask the rest of the Council members if they have any comments on those actions? No. "Dr. Dunne, you should be ashamed of yourself. After crying wolf during the last election, you go on to torment

another family. For such a highly educated woman, you acted childishly, and you owe this town some sort of explanation.”

Melissa Paltjon, 384 Whittier Avenue, thanked Ms. Colletti for speaking up. I have received many text messages in support. My children are okay. They understand what is going on. We explained the situation to them. But I am not okay with it and my mother is not okay with it. My husband is not okay with it and my neighbors are not okay with it. I have yet to receive an explanation. Never mind an apology. Her behavior was disgusting. It was an embarrassment to the town. An embarrassment to her party. An embarrassment to the Council. This is not the first time this has happened. I do not want an apology from Dr. Dunne. People understand where I am coming from. But at the last meeting I did ask Council for comment. I would expect an explanation. Pinder: nothing, no reach out to me or my husband or my family; Burke: nothing; thank you Trina for your concern, thank you Mayor for your concern, thank you Hal for your concern, thank you Cole for your concern. Dr. Dunne should not be able to get away with what she has done. Mr. Sigmon made a statement:

At the last Council meeting, members of Council were asked their views regarding an incident between Council President Dunne and a Dunellen resident. At the time, I was unfamiliar with the actions between the two parties and stated that I did not want to jump to any conclusions based on only what I had heard that night.

Since that meeting, I have had a chance to speak with both Council President Dunne and the residents and have ultimately concluded that although the incident warranted no legal action, Council President Dunne showed questionable judgement the day in question, and I was disappointed in her inability to take responsibility for her actions or to publicly or privately make amends for what happened. As elected officials we are held to a higher standard and need to remember that we are not only representing ourselves, but also the borough when interacting with our Dunellen friends, neighbors, and fellow residents.

Nikesh Patel, 245 Third Street, I think the Council’s decision to remove the word argumentative was probably a mistake. I heard and listened to the recording of last week’s meeting and the decision to remove the [phrase] argumentative and accusatory was not an accurate statement of what happened that night.

On the motion of Mrs. Burke and seconded by Dr. Dunne it was moved to accept the following:

10-18-2021: #7

**BE IT RESOLVED BY THE GOVERNING BODY OF THE BOROUGH OF DUNELLEN,
NEW JERSEY, THAT:**

The Dunellen Borough Council Meeting of October 18, 2021 is adjourned.

Yes: Burke, Dunne, Pinder, Rios, Sigmon and Vandermark

The YouTube presentation of this Council meeting can be found at:

<https://youtu.be/ARJXQCAD-3s>