

From the Desk of Mayor Frank Nunziato

At Monday's meeting, we heard a vibrant dialogue about whether to replicate the referendum question that was on last November's ballot: one asking whether to allow retail cannabis sales along the eastern side of Route 17 in Rutherford.

I encourage my Council colleagues to speak their mind on any topic. I equally encourage the public to attend our meetings and speak their mind. We can educate each other that way.

We heard from residents who shared disappointment they felt. By posing this question on a ballot a second time, they felt their voices weren't heard after last year's referendum on this failed. They felt their vote didn't matter.

Making people feel like their vote didn't matter is a terrible thing to do and not a precedent I want to set in Rutherford.

Prior to Monday's meeting, I didn't realize how frustrating it is to the people who voted "no" the first time, just to have their vote seemingly disregarded. But through some very raw and honest comments, some very passionate people educated me.

I'm sorry to say the meeting became heated and at times contentious. I was upset when it became evident members of the public were feeling they were being talked down to.

To those people, I hear you now. There are some things that transcend party affiliation. And I understand the points that were made. I believe my colleagues who voted in favor of adding the referendum question again handled it poorly by making the public feel that they were not heard, and that is not the way Council meetings should ever be. But we all need to hear you.

- Mayor Frank Nunziato



Estimated third quarter property taxes bills were mailed in June and are due August 1, 2024 with a 10 day grace period to August 12th.

Payments can be made via US mail, the drop box located to the left of the Donaldson Avenue entrance, or the online portal through the Borough website.

Please note: payments should be made prior to 4:00pm. If received after 4:00pm on August 12th, payments will be processed on the next business day and interest will apply.

New Jersey Property Tax Reimbursement (Senior Freeze) applications for first time filers can be picked up in the Tax Collector's office. The State has increased the income qualifications.

To get more detailed information please visit <https://www.nj.gov/treasury/taxation/ptr/index.shtml>



Thank you to Assemblyman Gary Schaer for attending Monday's meeting to present the niece of William Galloway, Ms. Ashurst, with a proclamation honoring her Uncle

WHEREAS, The General Assembly of the State of New Jersey notes with sadness the death of William Decatur Galloway Jr., a highly esteemed resident of the Garden State, who passed from this life on June 15, 2024, at the age of ninety-five; and,

WHEREAS, A proud Rutherfordian and a pillar of his community, William Decatur Galloway Jr. served our nation with honor in the United States Army's 761st Tank Battalion, known as the Black Panthers, a regiment of African American soldiers segregated from the white troops, and upon his honorable discharge, he attended Syracuse University and Brooklyn School of Pharmacy on the GI Bill, earning multiple degrees, including a master's in Pharmacology and an MBA in marketing, and,

WHEREAS, His extraordinary professional career spanned six decades, and he made immeasurable contributions as a pharmacist, in pharmaceutical sales, and as the Director of Medical Education at Hoffman LaRoche, but it was community service that truly invigorated him—a passion instilled by his father and one that burned bright in his endeavors on Rutherford's Board of Adjustment, the Lions Club, and the Board of Education; and,

WHEREAS, Widely admired for his invaluable work on the Education Policy Commission for the Board of Trustees at Fairleigh Dickinson University, he is further appreciated for his exemplary leadership as Vice President of Rutherford High School Hall of Fame, as President of Rutherford's Historical Preservation Commission, and as Commander of American Legion Post No. 453, which opened in 1948, welcomed the area's Black veterans who were shunned by other Posts, and continues to thrive—and meet the needs of its members—due to the hard-fought efforts of William Decatur Galloway Jr., who rallied with fellow veterans to keep its doors open; and,

WHEREAS, A jazz aficionado and an avid football fan with a penchant for genealogy, William Decatur Galloway Jr. was upheld in his life's journey by his beloved daughter, Wendi, and he took great pride in his step-granddaughter, Taryn, and in the accomplishments of his nieces, Roslyn and Terri; and,

WHEREAS, The family and friends of William Decatur Galloway Jr. will always cherish his valuable and irreplaceable presence in their lives and will forever hold for him an honored place in their hearts; and,

WHEREAS, Within all spheres, William Decatur Galloway Jr. established a model to emulate and set a standard of excellence toward which all others might strive; now, therefore,

Be It Resolved by the General Assembly of the State of New Jersey:

That this House hereby salutes the memory of William Decatur Galloway Jr. and extends profound sympathy and sincere condolences to all who mourn his passing; and, Be It Further Resolved, That a duly authenticated copy of this resolution, signed by the Speaker and attested by the Clerk, be transmitted to the family of William Decatur Galloway Jr.

Councilman Matthew Cokeley
mcokeley@rutherfordboronj.com

Dear residents, friends & colleagues,

Monday evening's effort to place the Class 5 Cannabis referendum question back on the ballot this November is rooted in 3.5 years' worth of research, interviews and data curation which I now have 3.5 months to present to the community for open discussion. It is the same timeline before us that I encountered last summer when the question was initially approved for referendum.

Within my presentation Monday night requesting support for the resolution, I began to share some of the information I have curated in the previous 3.5 years. One specific statistic several members of the community highlighted.

The stat which drew the target of their ire was that I referenced year over year voter turnout rates as one of the reasons to move forward again. For comparison, last year's election (2023) saw a 36% voter turnout while 2020's Presidential election saw an 80%* voter turnout here in the Borough. This year (2024) should be substantially similar to 2020's 80% turnout due to the Presidential nominees being on the ballot.

The staggering difference in those two numbers is enough for me to ask, "If we feel unheard, what about the other 44% (+/-) of our community? Don't they deserve a chance to be heard?"

While the difference in those statistics is possibly a substantial enough reason to ask this question again, the primary reason for turning around the effort so quickly is that 611 people missed or chose not to answer the referendum question in 2023. That specific number said to me that there was indeed an issue with how the 2023 referendum was managed and communicated. We can speculate that perhaps the missed votes were due to feeling uninformed about the question, a general apathy towards the subject or just missing the question on the back of the paper ballot due to the brand-new, and in some polling stations, chaotic nature of the voting mechanisms installed for that election.

As frustrating and aggravating as this all feels to some, several members of the community Monday night also expressed the sentiment that they appreciated the open dialogue and dissension amongst my council colleagues. They welcomed seeing us work through differences of opinion.

I whole-heartedly agree that we do not do enough in that regard. Part of me hopes that this effort can be a foundation for how we can operate as a governing body better and more openly moving forward.

To that end and in the interest of executing on my intended communication effort, I am creating a LinkTree account to store and disseminate all of my research and findings both for and against the idea of allowing a Cannabis dispensary along our Route 17 corridor. That link will be found next week under my bio on the Borough website. It will be updated repeatedly through the November election with all the documents and data I refer to in council meetings and via social media.

I have also already scheduled Two Town Hall debates with our communications director. They will take place:

1. September 12, 2024 at 7pm
2. October 23, 2024 also at 7pm

Both debates will consist of a panel of industry professionals and civilian activists. I will do my very best to include opinions from both sides and am open to volunteers or suggestions for professionals in relevant industries.

The format is currently being ironed out and location will be determined by volume of estimated attendees shortly.

In closing, I thank my colleagues and constituents who support the measure for the opportunity to finally execute on this important communication work.

Sincerely, Councilman Matthew R. Cokeley

Councilman Ray Guzmán
rguzman@rutherfordboronj.com

Regarding Monday nights M&C meeting, in particularly on the subject of Cannabis, a referendum request was put forth to place Class 5 retail Cannabis on the November 2024 ballot again.

In 2023 I supported the placing the retail cannabis question on the ballot as I strongly believed this was/is a decision for the people to make - not the governing body.

We asked the people to vote on this subject (2023) via referendum. The votes came in and the question to allow Class 5 retail Cannabis in the Borough of Rutherford was defeated by the people.

Monday's new request during the M&C meeting offered no new differences or details than the defeated 2023 referendum.

My vote on Monday was quite simple, "The People" regardless of how many votes were casted had already voted "No" 8 months ago. I voted to respect the will of the people and not support another referendum by voting "NO".

Councilwoman Christie Del Rey-Cone
cdelrey-cone@rutherfordboronj.com

Hello neighbors. The Rutherford Civil Rights Commission is working in earnest to plan the Multicultural Festival. It is taking place on September 7 (with a rain date of September 8) so please mark your calendars. The Commission is actively looking for vendors to participate in the event. If you would like to participate, please contact the Commission at civilrightscommission@rutherfordboronj.com.

As many of you are aware, Monday's meeting was filled with robust discussion about a proposed referendum for November's ballot. I encourage you all to speak to your elected officials (including myself) about how you and they feel on the topic and why they are taking the position they have taken about revisiting the referendum. Some of you have already reached out, I have responded and I am appreciative. Community engagement is critical to real conversation. My vote reflected my view that the governing body provided insufficient opportunities for the public to learn about the implications of this issue and have an opportunity for discussion ahead of the vote last election day. As a voter myself, I want information to be fresh in my mind when I am making a decision. As your elected representatives, we should always pursue further public engagement on critical questions. There is nothing untoward, secret or complicated about my view. While there has been discussion about use of the word "education" at the meeting - including by me - I was absolutely not suggesting our community is uneducated. The use of the word education was in line with providing information - it is our job to provide information to our community. Now it is on us to hold ourselves accountable for doing what we said we would. With all of this said, my mind is not closed on this issue. I see the commentary out there but I need to hear from you so we can have productive discussions. Enjoy your weekends.

The NJSEA is seeking input about roadway safety for the Meadowlands Action Plan for Safety.

Visit their website
www.maps4s.com for more information or fill out this survey about roadway safety concerns in the Meadowlands District:
<https://app.maptionnaire.com/q/2ib2you3g6b7>

SAFE STREETS FOR ALL
MEADOWLANDS ACTION PLAN FOR SAFETY (MAP4S)

MEADOWLANDS ACTION PLAN FOR SAFETY

To learn more about MAP4S, visit www.map4s.com
Scan the QR code to complete our survey on roadway safety in the Meadowlands

Council President Stephanie McGowan
smcgowan@rutherfordboronj.com

Dear Residents:

I am sharing my comments from this week's meeting shared during the discussion item of a referendum question for this year's general election.

"I wanted to take a moment to share my thoughts about tonight's discussion and regarding the addition of the Cannabis Class 5 Retail Sales for Public Vote on the November 2024 general election ballot.

In 2023, Councilman Cokely requested this exact ballot question to be included in the November 7, 2023 general election, and all present members of the council voted in favor of its inclusion. The intent of publicly asking the question was to determine the interest of the Borough in prioritizing the allowance of Cannabis Class 5 Retail Sales in Rutherford. On November 7th, the public question did not pass. Per the Bergen County Board of Elections, the question did not receive a favorable outcome in any of our 12 voting districts.

On March 11, 2024, a company interested in Rutherford pursuing a Class 5 Retail Sales license spoke during the hearing of citizens and asked for the Mayor and Council to move forward with issuing it, despite the recent public question posed and negative outcome received. At that meeting, during our public response, which the audio log is found under the meeting minutes of our website due to issues with u-tube, I stated, "I am not a fan of rushing into things. I think doing due diligence is important." Respectfully, I do not believe any further due diligence has been done since the November 7th election. During that March 11th meeting, it was stated there would be a town hall, information and education provided to the community and forums to garner feedback. In the past 128 days since that March 11th meeting, there has not been one planned public event, town hall, or any information provided to the community for educational purposes or additional communication. Moreover, in the 8 months since the failed referendum question was posed, there has been absolutely nothing organized around the reconsideration of this matter other than the promise stated by Councilman Cokely on March 11th, "The next few months will be the most educational experience this community has ever seen."

Tonight, we are being asked to literally put the same exact question on the ballot for consideration. Therefore, I ask my colleagues to consider the following:

1. There are absolutely no language changes to the referendum question presented for consideration tonight and the intent is exactly the same. Nothing has changed.
2. We have done no intervention as a borough that would warrant reconsideration to date and despite being given an outcome to the question 8 months ago, we are prepared to ignore the will of our constituents because it was a low voter turnout. Respectfully, there was no deadline to put this question on the ballot, it was a choice, and it was widely expected for the November 2023 election to be a low voter turnout.
3. The M&C has not been presented with a petition of residents calling for reconsideration of this matter or expressing concern that the question was improperly conveyed.

As I shared on March 11th, "I would not be comfortable speaking against the will of the people, and I do not believe anything has changed in the past 8 months that warrants reconsideration of this matter at this time. I am asking my colleagues to honor their commitment to the open public question process and outcomes received in the last election." Despite my objection, as the record indicates, the motion to proceed with adding the same referendum question to the 2024 general election passed. Although I appreciate the passion expressed by my colleagues, I have not seen any evidence presented to support the position expressed during our meeting that voters were confused, misled, or uneducated other than their anecdotal rationale.

Sadly, I suspect that we can now anticipate external lobbying efforts and organized referendum campaigns funded by those more interested in "winning" than the spirit of a non-binding referendum question- taking the temperature of our residents to guide our decision-making process.