

The Rutherford Report



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June 18, 2021

From the Desk of Acting Mayor Mark Goldsack

At Monday's meeting, the Council voted 4-1 to approve a redevelopment plan for the Williams Center. While the Council appreciated the thoughtful recommendations made by the Planning Board, the Council believes that the recommendations would have made the plan unreasonably restrictive. In light of the upcoming August 19th auction by the property's owner, Bergen County, the Council believes the best course of action is to put a plan in place that gives the Borough the control offered by the redevelopment process, and the flexibility offered by a plan that provides alternate development opportunities.

Although as Acting Mayor I was unable to vote on this issue, I do agree with its outcome.

I understand everyone's passion regarding the Williams Center, and specifically the Newman Theater, which many want to see preserved and restored to its former glory. For years, residents and elected officials alike have taken every opportunity possible to speak with potential investors and theater professionals, but as of now none of these conversations have borne any fruit.

The reality is there is not a legal mechanism afforded to the Borough that physically protects the theater. I support Councilman Mullahey's approach of adopting a plan that allows the Borough flexibility to negotiate. The more restrictions we put into the plan, the less we're afforded the opportunity to negotiate. We can insist that the Newman Theater is preserved in a redevelopment plan, but it will have no legal teeth when a buyer purchases it from the county. A less restrictive redevelopment plan, and one that incentivizes buyers to preserve and work around the Newman Theater, gives the Borough the flexibility we need to negotiate a plan that will not only support our arts community, but also provide a boost to our local economy.

It is entirely possible that a buyer wanting to refurbish and maintain the Newman Theater will still come forward. This plan does not prohibit that. The plan does, however, offer options to a potential buyer who may have creative ways to establish a thriving arts space that is economically viable. The Williams Center is an important part of the downtown, which is exactly why it's our duty to keep all options on the table that preserve its viability for generations to come.

Sincerely,
- Acting Mayor Mark Goldsack

Saturday, June 26th

Baby Parade



Check In 9:30 AM Start Time 10:00 AM Lincoln Park

Fireworks @ Memorial Field

(Rain Date June 27th)



Every Wednesday
with Thursday Rain Dates



Wednesdays & Saturdays
July 7 through October 30
Williams Center Plaza

Summer Concert Series @ Lincoln Park

Thursday, June 24th - Lifespeed

Details of other dates to follow!

Department News



DPW Annual Paper Shred Day &
Green Team Styrofoam Collection
Saturday, June 26 - 9:00am - 1:00pm
DPW Garage - 220 Highland Cross

Open to Rutherford Residents Only, proof of ID required.

Limit 4 boxes of shredding per person



**RecDesk Comprehensive Online
Registration System Now Open!**



3rd Quarter "Estimated" Tax Bills will be mailed
the week of June 21st. 3rd Quarter taxes will be
due between August 1st and August 10th.

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.

Council Reports

Councilman Ray Guzmán

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Library Liaison: I am happy to announce the completion of phase one pocket park located in front of the Rutherford Public Library. The new sitting wall park is part of the Borough's beautification vision. This new addition does not impede the area where the annual holiday Christmas tree is placed. I'd like to thank the DPW Department for making this project a reality. I'd also like to thank Acting Mayor Goldsack for Co-Chairing this project with me.

Williams Center:

I'd like to address my vote in support of the original redevelopment plan of the Williams Center as compared to the redevelopment recommendations put forth by the Planning Board. I have spent countless hours reviewing the plans submitted by Neglia Engineering as well as the planning board's recommendations and minutes from the public workshops. I have listened to many residents voicing their opinions and concerns.

My decision did not come quickly. I realize the Williams Center fate draws upon many opinions, factors and realities. I hear the residents loud and clear in support of having a home for the arts in our downtown area and preserving as much of the building as possible.

The question is: How is this achievable when we do not own the facility? Having a redevelopment plan in place with restrictions gives the residents a chance of hope. Having a performing arts venue in the heart of our business district makes sense. Our local downtown businesses will benefit from residents and visitors attending a nightout at the Williams Center.

I had to take a step back from all of the emotional feelings and focus on what would be the best negotiating redevelopment plans put forth to benefit the residents of Rutherford. Throughout my career of negotiating multimillion dollar contracts I have learned it is best to come to the table with many options. Having too few options at the beginning of a negotiation may leave you short-handed in the end. While I am grateful for all the hard work the Planning Board put into serving up their recommendations, I feel the plan is too limiting in trying to find a suitor.

Other pressing questions I had were: What happens if the county auction results in no buyer? Where do we go now? What will the county do? What happens to our downtown area and a chance of having a performing arts center? Because of these questions, and knowing our residents want and deserve a thriving downtown with a desire for an anchor destination for the arts, I have made my decision to support the original redevelopment plan.

Councilwoman Stephanie McGowan

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Recreation Liaison:

- **Senior Olympics** registration has opened! Event will take place in September, optional training will begin in August. Rutherford has been participating for over 25 years in the Tri County Senior Olympics
- Wrapped up a successful season of **Recreation Track & Field** with a celebration & ice cream! Over 150 participants in Rec Track & Field, and 8 volunteers
- **Reservations for park space is available on Rec Desk.** It is an easy way to see the calendar of all activities going on in the parks. Park permits have gone up exponentially as our community is ready to enjoy the outdoors! Fees for park usage are based on location, duration of time and number of attendees.
- **Baby Parade** will be on June 26, registration will be available on RecDesk. Residents can register for free to enjoy the cutest parade around!
- **Summer Camp** is scheduled to begin on Monday, June 28th. Junior Camp is now closed for registration, but space is still available in Senior & Kinder camp.
- We have partnered with US Sports institute for a summer camp program for 21/2 year olds to 5 year olds, more info can be found on our RecDesk site.

Thoughts on the William Center

The William Center has been at the center of debate for many years, even before I joined the Council in 2015. Personally, I had pitched many ideas about a variety of uses and tried to express those visions with potential investors. Sadly, the outcome was always the same: great idea, but the cost outweighed the benefit from a business perspective.

Now, the time has come where the property owners have decided to go forward with auctioning the property. After taking the many positions presented and guidance given into consideration, I believe that a less restrictive ordinance enables the Mayor and Council to have greater negotiating power on behalf of the residents we were elected to serve. I do think that our fiduciary responsibility is about making the hard decisions and doing the due diligence necessary to protect and represent the best interest of our 18,000 plus residents.

Further, we will have our professionals, who are hired to serve on behalf of the Borough, utilize their expertise in land use, regulations, and contracts to guide our decisions. Since we know the date for auction is quickly approaching, it is time for us to move this ordinance forward and prepare for the vision of what this important space can and should be once ownership is transferred.

I would be remiss if I did not express my appreciation to the WCW Board for their continued advocacy, the appointed group of citizens that provided feedback appointed by the former administration, our Borough Planning Board who provided thoughts and guidance for consideration and thank our residents for bringing their passion and requests forward. I would also express my sincerest gratitude for my Council colleague, Tom Mullahey, for holding public town halls to garner resident feedback and for providing a tremendous amount of information and support through this challenging decision process for the Mayor and Council.



Council Reports

Councilman Tom Mullahey

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Two years ago, I asked for the liaison assignment to the Williams Center. Two others before me had also held that liaison assignment. As liaison, I helped create a Williams Center committee with arts professionals, business owners and residents. Together we held two meetings where we collected public input. At these meetings, I repeatedly committed to taking public input and weighing it along with the options proposed by our hired professionals for a viable Williams Center going forward.

I fully expected and welcomed a passionate response from the residents about this redevelopment plan on Monday. What I didn't expect was being accused of not taking public input. I have always been transparent in saying that in order to maintain a revitalized arts center, there has to be an option for development that would increase any buyer's confidence in future profitability.

Members of the Williams Center committee did an excellent job over the years. I've attended their events and they've done as good a job as anyone to raise awareness. I've talked with individuals and groups that might be able to rehab the theater, as have my colleagues and members of the community. It always comes down to the same pattern: a lot of great ideas are discussed, but after requesting a proposal and proof of funds from the interested party, the conversation ends.

38 residents spoke at Monday's meeting. They basically all agreed that preserving the Newman Theater as-is should be a non-negotiable component of any redevelopment plan. What they didn't agree on was how to do it. Or what other components to the Williams Center could best serve Rutherford in the future.

We heard people say how they don't want Rutherford to be urban like Jersey City, followed by speakers who praised Jersey City's ability to promote the arts. I've done my research in Jersey City, where unlike Rutherford, the city owned the theater and had the budgetary resources to support the theater for 20+ years while they awaited an investor. Even under those circumstances, serious donors didn't come forward to support large arts projects until they knew there was a local population density that would guarantee a return on their investment.

After years of ideas, we are at the point where this project needs specifics. And while we may ultimately disagree, I would hope you can appreciate the complicated nature of creating a redevelopment plan that marries often contradictory public opinions with the data driven input of our hired professionals. I do believe this redevelopment plan comes as close to accomplishing that as possible, and I look forward to being able to negotiate the best for Rutherford with whoever the County sells the property to.

Councilwoman Maria Begg-Roberson

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The Williams Center

I wish to explain my "no" vote against The Williams Center redevelopment plan on June 14, 2021. I also voted against it in December of 2020 before this plan went to the planning board because I strongly believe in a preservation clause that would definitively protect the theater. I am also concerned about the possible height allowances in the plan. I have always believed that this plan should be more restrictive. I refuse to be responsible for the possible loss of an historical building. Structures like this are sacred and there are not many left. Too many of America's historical buildings are gone.

I want to thank the Williams Center Board who has worked diligently to raise money, pay the bills, and infuse culture into the town through craft beer nights, art exhibits, holiday markets, concerts, and comedy nights, and more. The Williams Center is the heart of our community, and it should be protected.

Rutherford Pride Alliance (RPA)

The Rutherford Pride Alliance had this third pride flag raising at Borough Hall on June 5th. Thank you to the flawless planning of Christine Weiss-Biedel and the leadership of RPA President Rob Lyons. Mayor Frank Nunziatio and the Council attended along with other dignitaries such as, Congressman Pascrell, Commissioner Tracy Zur, and Bergen County Sheriff Anthony Cureton. Over 300 residents were in attendance to support our LGBTQ+ community.

Rutherford Green Team

Don't throw out your styrofoam; recycle it! Bring your styrofoam to Rutherford's Shred Day event, June 26, 9:00-1:00, at the Department of Public Works, 220 Highland Cross.

- EPS only: this is the kind of styrofoam used in packaging, shipping, and insulation
- NO XPS: including styrofoam peanuts and takeout food containers or beverage cups
- All styrofoam must be white, clean, and free of labels or tape

Rutherford Civil Rights Commission (RCRC)

The RCRC awarded the Thaddeus L. Marshall scholarship awarded to Ellah Brown, a Rutherford High School graduate from the Class of 2021. Ellah plans to study Music Therapy with a concentration in Jazz, specifically Harlem Renaissance era jazz at Howard University this fall.

Council Reports

Councilman Matthew Cokeley

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I would like to take a moment to touch on the vote in favor of the William Carlos Williams Center redevelopment plan at this past Monday's Mayor & Council Meeting.

To those not in attendance, I cast my vote in favor of the plan so that we, The Borough of Rutherford, can have concrete benchmarks in place and on time for the auction deadline of August 19th while still allowing for the Mayor & Council to enter negotiations from a position of strength come the next phase of the process.

For the record, I remain steadfast in my support for preserving and/or resurrecting the Williams Center in all of its glory. Whether the scenario be "new skin on old bones" or "old skin on new bones" my commitment to the arts and to Rutherford as a cultural resource and destination, with the Williams Center being the epicenter, continues to be unwavering.

I will continue to explore any and all opportunities to find investment scenarios and other collaborative scenarios that can help achieve the goal of making Rutherford the arts epicenter I believe it can be.

If you have a contact point for someone or know of someone who might be a resource and/or sympathetic ear for this effort, please do not hesitate to reach out. I would be happy to field a call, send an email or share my documentation on what is required as a representative of the Borough.

There is no time nor room for conspiracy, accusations and hearsay. We must trust and believe in one another as family, friends and neighbors of this wonder filled place. Even if we fail in our primary endeavor before August 19th then, at the very least, we will be aligned for the next chapter in this story and continue the fight as a more unified and formidable community.

I thank you one and all for your support and understanding.

Fire Department: The Borough would like to welcome Drew Stone into the ranks of the Rutherford Volunteer Fire Department as a member of Engine Company No. 4. We thank you and your family for your commitment and service to us.

The Borough also accepts the resignation of Julian Cousineau from Engine Company No. 3 as he leaves us as both a Fireman and neighbor. We wish Julian and his family health and happiness in his next Chapter and thank both him and his family for their dedication and service.

If you or someone you know is interested in becoming a Rutherford Volunteer Firefighter - youth or adult - email recruitment@rutherfordfd.com.

The Rutherford Fire Department's Junior Firefighter's program is now open to 16 and 17 year old youths.

Social Services: Families in need of emergency food please contact the Social Services Director, Genevieve Kacmarcik, at 201- 460-3028 or gkacmarcik@rutherfordboronj.com or me directly at mcokeley@rutherfordboronj.com and we can connect you with the Rutherford Food Pantry.