



8/18 Update for the Upcoming (8/26) Public Hearing on the Abbey

Dear Residents,

I write to update you on our plans for the upcoming (8/26) Public Hearing on the Abbey.

Per the certified letter that was sent on 8/11/20 to residents who live within 200 feet, we do plan to begin the Public Hearing at 6 PM on Wednesday, August 26th. This letter provided information about the Zoom-access component of this meeting. Unfortunately, it did not reference our plans to also include provisions for in-person attendance (which had not yet been finalized at that time). Regrettably, this omission has led to confusion and frustration, and for that, I sincerely apologize.

My purpose here is to provide complete information about this upcoming meeting so residents have a full understanding of what to expect.

Please know that all of us on the Township Committee fully understand how important it is for anyone who is comfortable and interested to be able to attend this meeting in person. We are doing everything we can to ensure safe in-person attendance for as many people as possible.

Given the unprecedented challenges COVID presents, our intention all along has been to conduct this Public Hearing via a “hybrid” model: with Zoom-access for anyone who is not comfortable attending in person while also providing in-person attendance to the extent that State guidelines allow.

The latest COVID guidance from the State limits indoor gatherings to no more than 25 people and outdoor gatherings to no more than 500 people. Strict rules re: social distancing, masks, personal hygiene, and equipment cleaning apply in both of these circumstances and will be strictly enforced accordingly.

Given the full range of tech and logistical challenges posed by holding this meeting at an outdoor venue (especially the challenges of producing reliable hotspot internet connectivity as well as weather-related considerations), **our plan for conducting this meeting is as follows:**

In our meeting room at Town Hall, we will set up in-person attendance for any member of the Township Committee (TC) and any of our professionals who are comfortable attending in person. Any of our TC members or professionals who are not comfortable attending in person will participate via Zoom. This “comfort level” is a matter of individual choice, which we ask everyone to acknowledge and respect.

In our parking lot at Town Hall, we will set up a large screen and sound system. Video of the meeting will be projected on the screen. Socially-distanced seating will be available in the parking lot for anyone who's interested. Per State COVID guidelines, social distancing (6 feet between unrelated persons) is required and will be strictly enforced. Masks are strongly encouraged but not absolutely required outdoors provided that social distancing is being strictly followed. Folding chairs will be available, but bringing your own (possibly more comfortable) lawn chairs is recommended.

During this hearing, anyone who wishes to share their questions or comments in person will be able to do so. Approximately 3-5 people at a time will be escorted into the meeting room where they will be able to speak directly to the TC members and professionals who are there in person.

Video of these interactions will be aired on the large screen in the parking lot. Mask-wearing in the meeting room is required.

If weather conditions that evening do not permit outdoor video projection, our back-up plan will be as follows: The large screen and outdoor seating in chairs will be cancelled. The meeting will be carried out largely by Zoom – with primary access being from your own home. For anyone who has a strong preference to share their comments in person, we will allow 3-5 individuals at a time into the meeting room to do so, but in this case, access to video of the meeting will have to be through your own device (phone or I-Pad, for example) from a location outside the meeting room – most likely your car. While we anticipate that most people will not want to do this, we will offer it as an option for anyone who is interested.

We also have plans to address some of the tech challenges residents have brought to our attention - including the following actions and resources:

- We will be conducting two “training/practice” sessions for Zoom participation: one on Thursday 8/20 from 7-9 PM and another on Monday 8/24 from 3-5 PM. Both sessions will be conducted by Zoom.
- Further information about the content of these training sessions and log-on links to participate in them will be shared on the Township's [website](#) and [Facebook page](#) as well as via the Municipal Messenger.
- Anyone who is not already signed up for the Municipal Messenger is strongly encouraged to sign up. The sign-up link can be found on the homepage of the Township's website or [here](#).
- Additional training resources can be found in the following link from the Township's website: [Having Issues with Zoom? View Video Tutorials Provided Here to Learn More](#)
- Anyone who is not able to get on Zoom at all should send an email which includes your PHONE NUMBER, to our administrator, Tim Quinn, at administration@morristwp.com. Tim will have a tech volunteer call you and guide you through the process of activating Zoom.

On July 16th, I sent a [Message to Residents](#) who had reached out to express their thoughts re: the Abbey. This message (which is posted on the Township's [website](#)) provides detailed information re: the challenges COVID has forced (and continues to force) upon us and the reasons for the choices we made at that time – and now. Excerpts of that letter are included in the mailing we are sending to residents in the surrounding neighborhood on 8/17. I encourage anyone who plans to participate in the upcoming Public Hearing to read this message beforehand.

At this point, for all of the reasons enumerated in detail in my July 16th Message to Residents, we do plan to proceed with the Public Hearing on the Abbey at 6PM on August 26th as outlined here, and if more time is needed, on September 3rd as well.

The link to log on to the 8/26 Public Hearing can be found [HERE](#) or on the Township's website.

I hope this message has helped to clarify your understanding and expectations re: the upcoming (8/26) Public Hearing on the Abbey. While this situation is extremely difficult (clearly there is no ideal solution that will satisfy everyone), at the same time, I hope you can see that we on the Township Committee are working very hard and in good faith to implement safe, in-person attendance for as many people as possible given the unprecedented challenges COVID is presenting for all of us.

In that spirit, a majority of us on the Township Committee believe it serves the best interest of our community

to proceed with the Public Hearing on this project on 8/26 as outlined here. We look forward to seeing as many residents as possible at that time and to keeping in touch in the meantime.

Best to all,
Cathy

Cathy Wilson
Morris Township Mayor

Morris Township | 973-326-7400 | www.morristwp.com

