

REGULAR MEETING
LAWRENCE TOWNSHIP COUNCIL
LAWRENCE TOWNSHIP MUNICIPAL BUILDING
COUNCIL MEETING ROOM – LOWER LEVEL

September 16, 2025

The following are the Minutes of a Regular Meeting of the Lawrence Township Council that was held on Tuesday, September 16, 2025, at 6:30 p.m.

The meeting was opened with the Inspiration and Pledge of Allegiance, led by the Municipal Clerk.

Mayor Farmer stated that due to Councilwoman Perry's absence, the Fire Study will not be discussed at tonight's meeting. She relayed that the Mayor's Task Force will issue their recommendations to Council tonight, and indicated that this report not only represents the future of the Community Center, but also the culmination of months of hard work, sacrifice and collaboration. Mayor Farmer then thanked Task Force Chair Dr. Christopher Woolley for his outstanding leadership, and to all Task Force members for their countless hours dedicated to ensure the process was thorough, inclusive, and rooted in what is best for Lawrence Township. She summarized the various steps taken by the Task Force in carrying out their duties, and stated that she is confident that this plan reflects both the history of the community and vision for the future. Finally, on behalf of the Council, Mayor Farmer thanked the Task Force members for illustrating what it means to work together for the good of Lawrence Township.

At the commencement of the meeting Mayor Farmer read the following statement of proper notice:

STATEMENT OF PROPER NOTICE: "Adequate notice of this meeting of the Lawrence Township Council being held on Tuesday, September 16, 2025, has been provided through the posting of the annual meeting schedule of said Council in accordance with Section 13 of the Open Public Meetings Act." Said Notice was forwarded to The Trentonian, The Times and The Princeton Packet on December 19, 2024.

The roll was then called as follows:

Present: Councilmembers Bobbitt, Kownacki, Santos and Mayor Farmer.
Absent: Councilwoman Perry.

Also in attendance were Kevin Nerwinski, Esq., Municipal Manager, and Arthur Sypek, Esq., Municipal Attorney.

Special Proclamations, Recognitions and Presentations

Dr. Christopher Woolley, Chair of the Lawrence Community Center Task Force, began a PowerPoint presentation and stated that he is honored to present to Council, Manager Nerwinski, and the public the following recommendations, which were based on data collected from the community. He thanked the Task Force members, citizens of Lawrence Township, community groups, and all those who contributed to this project, and stated that the Task Force members voted unanimously in support of the recommendations. He then gave an overview of why the Task Force was created, including the idea that it was formed to preserve the Center's legacy as a vital and inclusive space for all Lawrence Township residents through permanent symbolic representation and ongoing action. He then reviewed the concerns that were raised by the community input sessions, the ways in which data was collected, and how the data was analyzed by Dr. Mary McKillip. The top priorities, he stated, were answering the question of who the Community Center was for, and underscoring the need for strategic partnerships. He then gave the floor to Ms. Olga Martinez to continue the presentation.

Ms. Olga Carrillo-Martinez introduced herself as a member of the Lawrence Community Center Task Force. She then gave an overview of how the data was collected and evaluated, and informed Council that this information is contained within the final report. She explained that they engaged the community to ensure that the decisions reflected the residents' collective needs and aspirations.

Mr. William Chester continued the presentation, stating that the Task Force was charged to advise Council on concerns and priorities of Lawrence Township residents. He then discussed several Task Force recommendations, including the adoption of a clear and inclusive mission that recognizes the Center as a unifying Township-wide resource, the articulation of a vision that names the Center as a space for all residents, the renaming of the Center to "The Lance Corporal Douglas R. Dickerson Jr. Community & Recreation Center," the development of strategic partnerships to include organizations and nonprofits to share resources, and the creation of a representative body to staff and govern the Center.

Ms. Heather Berman next presented the charge to address the mission statement and future vision of the Lawrence Community Center. She discussed several recommendations to that effect, including creating mission and vision statements that encompass feedback from the report, fostering equality, learning, recreation and well-being through accessible programs and services, unifying residents through dynamic programs, and sharing stories and collaborative leadership where diversity is celebrated and everyone has the opportunity to belong, contribute and flourish.

Ms. Bonnie Giglio continued the presentation by reviewing the Task Force's six *Statement of Values* recommendations. She relayed that the first statement of value, *Equity & Inclusion*, asks for fair access for all Lawrence residents, regardless of race, religion, gender, or income, while the second statement of value, *Community Voice*, asks that the residents of Lawrence Township shape the programs, policies and priorities of their community center. She stated that the third statement of value, *Collaboration*,

requests that the Center partners with local organizations, religious institutions, schools and residents to deliver responsive, high-quality services, while the fourth statement of value, *Respect for Legacy*, honors the history and impact of the Center through words and action and uplifts the stories of long-time community members. Ms. Giglio shared that the fifth statement of value, *Transparency & Accountability*, aims to operate with openness, sharing outcomes and continuously seeking feedback to improve and grow, while the sixth and final statement of value, *Lifelong Growth & Belonging*, supports personal, social and civic development for residents of all ages, creating a space where everyone feels they belong.

Ms. Martha Friend closed the presentation by reviewing the charge to preserve the Center's legacy as a vital inclusive space for all Lawrence Township residents. She reported that the first recommendation consists of installing a permanent exhibit honoring the Center's history, reincorporating historic signage, and establishing a Legacy Council of long-time residents to guide commemorative programming and storytelling. Ms. Friend stated that the second recommendation entails naming the building in honor of Lance Corporal Douglas R. Dickerson Jr., while the third recommendation involves the creation of a plaque naming and honoring the Community Center Founders. She relayed that the fourth recommendation asks that community input and equity are maintained through strategic partnerships, while the fifth and final recommendation seeks biannual Township-wide meetings to ensure input from underrepresented groups.

Mayor Farmer once again thanked the Task Force for their outstanding work, and for delivering this presentation to Council. She then asked if Council had any questions for the Task Force regarding the material presented.

Councilwoman Santos asked Mr. Nerwinski to explain how and to what extent could a municipal-run building pursue partnerships with nonprofit organizations.

Mr. Nerwinski responded that he does not yet have a clear idea of how this could work and noted that the report raises numerous questions about how to approach the concepts presented. He added that he would need time to review the matter further and is not in a position to provide an answer at this time.

Mr. Sypek relayed that there are two statutes that deal with public buildings and the use by a nonprofit organization. He stated that they are in the process of researching the statutes and how they relate to the Task Force recommendations; however, it is not yet clear how it could work. He explained that he hopes to provide a definitive answer as it pertains to a legal analysis by the next meeting.

Mr. Nerwinski expressed that if Council informs him that they would like both the Recreation Department and nonprofits to be permanently housed in the Community Center, he would not know how this would work. However, he explained that if the Community Center was leased to a nonprofit "parent" who brings in other nonprofits, as was done with HomeFront, he could see this scenario being a possibility.

Further discussion was had with regard to non-permanent programming operating within the Community Center being a possibility as this is something that currently takes place within the Lawrence Township Library, the Community Center being a Township-owned building, and the question of how nonprofits can use the building if there is a municipal body also operating within the building.

Councilman Bobbitt stated that the previous model had always involved the Township-owned property being operated by various nonprofit organizations, rather than a Township entity and a nonprofit entity jointly utilizing the building at the same time. He quoted the survey, which stated that among the survey respondents, forty-two percent had never visited the Lawrence Community Center while it was operational, while only sixteen percent were reported to visit the Center frequently. He read further, stating that the biggest challenge by respondents to using the Center was a lack of awareness of available programs and events. Mr. Bobbitt questioned whether the building would be operated in the same manner as it had been in the past, expressing concern that this could lead to the same issue recurring, with certain Township residents not using the Center or not being aware of the programs offered. He also wished to point out that of the 159 survey respondents, there was an underrepresentation of South Asian, East Asian, Hispanic and Latino residents, so he feels that an opportunity was missed to reach those members of the community. Finally, Mr. Bobbitt thanked the Task Force for all of their work, and stated that their report was helpful in crystallizing their mission and vision for the Community Center.

Mayor Farmer stated that Council was having very good discussion, and stated that their goal is to be more inclusive, make people aware of what the Center offers, and to engage more of our Township residents. She then stated, for the benefit of the public, that Council has had the report for the past two weeks, and are still digesting much of the information, and wish to have more dialogue and discussion amongst themselves.

Public Participation

Mr. Fred Vereen stated that he was the first director of the Neighborhood Center, and explained that the director ran the Center with a budget consisting of funds received from Lawrence Township, the County and the Federal government, and relayed that the money they raised went through the County prior to the incorporation. He recalled the very first meeting in 1965 for the formation of the Lawrence Community Action Council that came under the Lyndon B. Johnson Federal Program called, "War on Poverty." Mr. Vereen reminisced about the humble beginnings of the Community Center, and marveled at how far it has come, with the updates, innovations, activities, and variety of programs that the Community Center currently offers for the enrichment of the community. He then thanked the Council and Manager for their support of the current Task Force, the members of the Task Force for their hard work and leadership, and the citizens of the community for their participation. Finally, he remarked that the ball is in the court of the Council and Manager, and implored them to take the recommendations seriously to find a way to make the Community Center work.

Ms. Sharon O'Donnell stated that she is the board president at Lawrenceville Point, and is present tonight with a number of Lawrenceville Point residents to share their concerns regarding a paving project that was supposed to have taken place in their community. She explained that for the past ten years she has been told that her community is on the list for this project, then later informed that the project would take place this autumn, and has now been notified that it will instead take place in spring of 2026. She noted that there are many elderly citizens in her neighborhood, and because there are no sidewalks, they are forced to walk in the streets under hazardous conditions. She would like to know if the project will begin this fall as they were originally informed.

Mr. Nerwinski responded that he does not have the answer to her inquiry at this time, as the answer would fall under the purview of Jim Parvesse, the Lawrence Township Engineer. He stated that if he knew that she would be attending tonight's meeting he would have had an answer prepared for her, but acknowledged that he has her email address and will be in contact with her to provide clarification on this issue.

Mr. Mark Sherr stated that he is also on the board of Lawrenceville Point, and had called Mr. Parvesse in order to receive a time frame of when the pavement project will take place in their neighborhood and the estimated time of completion, to which Mr. Parvesse responded that it would not take place until the spring.

Mr. Nerwinski responded that he will find out the information and provide him with the answer as to why the project may have gotten delayed. He explained that most often it is not the Township but the contractor who has delayed the project. Mr. Nerwinski stated once more that he will investigate the issue and provide him with an answer and some clarity on a definitive timeframe.

Mr. Jim Burd stated that he is a former Hopewell Township Mayor, and asked Council to provide him with a status update to the traffic problem that exists between Federal City Road, Bull Run Road, Federal Point Boulevard and Forge Circle. Because the dangerous traffic road conditions affect the Townships of Lawrence, Ewing, and Hopewell, he recommends that the Mayors and Town Councils of these municipalities get together to review this issue and resolve this problem.

Mayor Farmer thanked Mr. Burd for his comments and explained that the Mayors of these Townships have met, they are aware of the problem, and they are working on a solution.

Mr. Nerwinski responded that the three communities have met on multiple occasions to discuss the issues at Bull Run Road, Federal Point Boulevard and Federal City Road. He relayed that it was Lawrence Township's recommendation that the three municipalities join forces to install traffic lights at the intersection of Federal City Road and Bull Run Road, as well as Federal Point and Federal City Road, after traffic studies determined that lights were warranted at those locations. Mr. Nerwinski reported that Ewing and Hopewell Townships were not interested in sharing the cost of the design and installation of the lights, so Lawrence determined to move forward with the traffic light at

Federal Point and address the issue themselves. He disclosed that the design work is currently under review with the New Jersey Department of Transportation, and once they are approved, the Township can move forward with the final design and construction of the traffic light. Mr. Nerwinski noted that Ewing is pursuing a grant to fund the installation of a traffic circle at Bull Run Road, for which Lawrence Township provided a Resolution of Support. In short, Mr. Nerwinski expressed that Lawrence Township is moving forward with the things that they can control that will best serve this community.

Ms. Elizabeth Roedell stated that she is a resident of South Brunswick Township and lives near the Williams/Transco compressor station that is a part of the Northeast Supply Enhancement (NESE) Project, and has opposed this project since 2016. She stated that eighteen towns across New Jersey have passed Resolutions opposing the NESE project, and she asked that Council consider adopting a Resolution opposing the NESE project also.

Ms. Joyce Scott asked several questions regarding the Community Center, such as why there were no building inspections while HomeFront was operating the Community Center, why did they not make the building ADA accessible, were they leasing the building, and how did the Township get to the point where they allowed HomeFront to lease the building in the first place?

Mr. Nerwinski responded that HomeFront leased the building from the Township for one dollar, while the Township was paying \$100,000.00 per year to help fund the programming. He responded that HomeFront taking over the building was before his time, so he did not have an answer as to the circumstances by which they were allowed to lease the building from the Township. However, he revealed that the Township did fund major improvements regarding the HVAC system and the roofing, but not significant renovations such as adding an elevator or installing ramps.

Councilman Bobbitt responded that the ADA was adopted in the early 1990's under President George Bush, so many things that were built prior to that time are not necessarily required to be upgraded until a certain amount of renovation work occurs. Additionally, Mr. Bobbitt revealed that he found the lease agreement between the Township and HomeFront from 2014, which states that HomeFront should be responsible for routine maintenance and upkeep.

Mr. Samuel Olando stated that he has been a resident of Lawrence Township for over fifteen years, and has worked for HomeFront during the time they leased the Community Center from the Township. He admitted that they may not have been a perfect organization; however, they did create jobs for residents and served the residents of Lawrence and surrounding Townships. Mr. Olando implored the Council to maintain diversity as the Township has changed over the years, and to embrace the old, because history will help younger generation make better decisions.

Mr. Bobbitt wished to clarify his earlier statements regarding the Community Center, stating that according to the survey report, there were certain members of the

community that did not know about the Center, and because he did not wish to repeat the past, he would like the Community Center to be available to the entire Lawrence Township community. In addition, he stated that when he spoke about underrepresentation of Asians and Hispanics, he was talking about the survey and survey respondents, not residents who are using the building, or Task Force members.

Mr. Jim Hooker asked if the ADA improvements will need to happen in either situation, whether a nonprofit lease the building, or whether the Township takes over the building.

Mr. Nerwinski responded that once the Township knows the vision, if Community Center will remain a Township-owned building or if it will be substantially run by another entity, then the Township can decide if and how it will move forward with renovations.

Mr. Jim Hooker had several comments he wished to make at tonight's meeting. He first remarked that Mr. Vereen's speech was beautiful and uplifting, and suggested that it be posted in an op-ed in the local newspaper so that others can read and be inspired by his words. He then stated that he is a board member of the Friends of Colonial Lake Park Nonprofit, and has held many of their meetings at the Community Center when he was unable to reserve space at the library. Next, he noted that Fall Fest was held at Colonial Lake park this past weekend, which he said was a wholesome community event. Mr. Hooker observed that the parking lot behind the bowling alley was being returned to its natural state, which he indicated was appreciated by the neighborhood. Finally, he relayed that State of New Jersey has decided to stop stocking Colonial Lake with trout because they believe the fishing at this location to be substandard; however, Mr. Hooker feels strongly that not only should it be stocked, but it should be stocked at least three times a year, and asked Council to intervene and persuade the State to reconsider this decision.

Ms. Sylwia Kobus stated, as it relates to the Community Center, that community only does as well as those who are least advantaged in that community. She remarked that the Community Center has been doing so many great things for the community, and asked that Council consider keeping the building as a Community Center.

Mr. Jeremy Ryan thanked Mr. Bobbitt for his earlier comments, and responded that current data is a strong starting foundation, even if it does not completely match the Town's complete current demographics. He noted that communities do not stand still, demographics shift, needs evolve, and interests change over time, which raises the opportunity for inclusion to be a current part of the Community Center's operations. Mr. Ryan suggested that periodic data collections and assessments be implemented every few years to ensure that participation and changes are being tracked, and programs are being adjusted accordingly in order for the Center to remain inclusive and representative of the people it serves.

Review and Revisions of Agenda

On a motion by Councilman Bobbitt, seconded by Councilwoman Santos, the Agenda was amended to table Item 16-A, Council Discussion on Pending Fire Study RFP and Selection of Consulting Firm, to the October 7th meeting by the following roll call vote:

Ayes: Councilmembers Bobbitt, Kownacki, Santos and Mayor Farmer.
 Nays: None.
 Absent: Councilwoman Perry.
 Abstain: None.

Mr. Sypek noted the motion passed.

Adoption of Minutes

On a motion by Councilman Bobbitt, seconded by Councilwoman Santos, the Minutes of the Regular Meeting of May 6, 2025 were approved without corrections on the following roll call vote:

COUNCIL	AYE	NAY	PRESENT	ABSENT	ABSTAIN	MOVE	SECOND
Mr. Bobbitt	X					X	
Mr. Kownacki	X						
Ms. Perry				X			
Ms. Santos	X						X
Mayor Farmer	X						

On a motion by Councilman Bobbitt, seconded by Councilwoman Santos, the Minutes of the Regular Meeting of May 20, 2025 were approved without corrections on the following roll call vote:

COUNCIL	AYE	NAY	PRESENT	ABSENT	ABSTAIN	MOVE	SECOND
Mr. Bobbitt	X					X	
Mr. Kownacki	X						
Ms. Perry				X			
Ms. Santos	X						X
Mayor Farmer	X						

Awarding or Rejecting of Bids

There was no award or rejection of bids.

Introduction of Ordinances

There was no introduction of ordinances.

Adoption of Ordinances

There was no adoption of ordinances.

Manager's Report –

Municipal Manager Kevin Nerwinski submitted invoice listings for the month of September 2025 in the amount of \$2,114,127.97.

Mr. Nerwinski shared that the next Council meeting will take place upstairs, in the newly renovated Council Meeting Room, as it is 95% completed. They are waiting for a few accent pieces, but hope to have it completed by the October 7th meeting.

Attorney's Report –

There was no attorney's report.

Clerk's Report –

Municipal Clerk, Tonya Carter, reported that the Ballot Box for Elections will open on Monday, September 22, 2025 for residents to vote by mail. Additionally, Ms. Carter asked Council to notify her if they would like her to sign them up for the NJ League of Municipalities Conference, which will be held November 18th through November 20th.

Unfinished Business –

There was no unfinished business.

Old Business/New Business –

There was no old business/new business.

Public Participation (3-minute limitation per speaker) –

There was no public participation.

Resolutions

On a motion by Councilman Bobbitt, seconded by Councilwoman Santos, Resolution Nos. 300-25 (18-A.1) through 312-25 (18-H.4) were moved by the following roll call vote. Mr. Nerwinski asked Mr. Sypek if there was a need for a Closed Session tonight, to which Mr. Sypek responded that they put a number of things under Item 18-H.4 in anticipation but none of the items have fruition for discussion tonight, so a closed session is no longer needed. Mr. Bobbitt amended his motion to remove Resolution No. 312-25 (18-H.4) given the information provided Mr. Sypek.

Resolution Nos. 300-25 (18-A.1) through 312-25 (18-H.3) were approved by the following roll call vote:

COUNCIL	AYE	NAY	PRESENT	ABSENT	ABSTAIN	MOVE	SECOND
Mr. Bobbitt	X					X	
Mr. Kownacki	X						
Ms. Perry				X			
Ms. Santos	X						X
Mayor Farmer	X						

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On a motion by Councilman Bobbitt, seconded by Councilwoman Santos, Resolution No. 312-25 (18-H.4) was tabled until the October 7<sup>th</sup> meeting by the following roll call vote:

| COUNCIL      | AYE | NAY | PRESENT | ABSENT | ABSTAIN | MOVE | SECOND |
|--------------|-----|-----|---------|--------|---------|------|--------|
| Mr. Bobbitt  | X   |     |         |        |         | X    |        |
| Mr. Kownacki | X   |     |         |        |         |      |        |
| Ms. Perry    |     |     |         | X      |         |      |        |
| Ms. Santos   | X   |     |         |        |         |      | X      |
| Mayor Farmer | X   |     |         |        |         |      |        |

Cited Resolutions are spread in their entirety in the Resolution Books of the Township of Lawrence.

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**Council Initiatives/Liaison Reports –**

Mayor Farmer reported that the Historic Preservation Committee met this past week and approved two improvement projects, which she presented to the Council using photographs that illustrated the improvements residents are making on their historical homes.

Mayor Farmer reported that the Trails and Open Space Committee met this past week to discuss initiatives that they are interested in pursuing, and will be meeting with Manager Nerwinski, as they have already met Township Engineer, James Parvesse. Mayor Farmer will take a walk with committee members around the Delaware and Raritan Canal Trail sometime in the near future to discuss these initiatives. She reported that they also have questions regarding when the Department of Transportation will make their Brunswick Pike improvements.

Mayor Farmer shared that the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee is meeting this Thursday and will discuss the *Resolution Expressing the Commitment of Lawrence Township to Equal, Respectful and Dignified Treatment of All People, Regardless of Their Legal Status in the United States, and to Remain a Fair and Welcoming Community*. She also wished to note that the Planning Board did not meet this week.

Mayor Farmer relayed that she is currently attending the Governor's Conference on Housing and Economic Development held in Atlantic City, and has found it to be very insightful, as she has learned about tax credits, Affordable Housing, and other topics of value which she plans to share with the Planning Board.

Finally, Mayor Farmer thanked Councilman Kownacki for the fine job he did on the September 11<sup>th</sup> ceremony. Mr. Kownacki stated that he asked Councilwoman Santos, a trained opera singer, to perform at the ceremony and noted that she did an excellent job. He reported that she sang two selections: the United States national anthem and *God Bless America*. Mr. Kownacki also expressed his appreciation to Colonel Bob Watson of the 112<sup>th</sup> Artillery, who had been activated during 9/11 and spoke at the ceremony about the role the military played during that time.

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#### **Written Communications –**

Mayor Farmer reported that she received a letter from Hands Across New Jersey, regarding their event to honor the United States Constitution by joining hands from Fort Lee to Washington Crossing Historic Park. She noted that within the Township, the route will span Main St. to Craven Lane, returning to Main Street, and spanning Lawrenceville Road and Princeton Avenue. She relayed that this event will be held on September 17, 2025 from 4:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.

Mayor Farmer stated that the Greater Mercer TMA has informed Lawrence Township that they have earned gold recognition level and statewide recognition in the New Jersey Safe Routes to School Recognition Program for 2025-2027. She relayed that Greater Mercer TMA, the New Jersey Safe Routes to Schools, and the New Jersey Department of Transportation appreciate Lawrence Township's significant role in this achievement.

Mayor Farmer relayed that on Friday, October 24, 2025, Younity (formerly Womanspace), will be holding its 24<sup>th</sup> Annual Communities of Light fundraiser, and is asking all municipalities and police departments in Mercer County to participate. She reported that thousands of candles will be lit at dusk to serve as a symbol of hope for all those who struggle with violence in their homes.

Mayor Farmer then asked if all of Council was in favor of supporting Younity's 24<sup>th</sup> Annual Communities of Light fundraiser, to which all of Council responded "aye."

Mayor Farmer shared that Council received the resolution request to oppose the Williams Transco Northeast Supply Enhancement (NESE) Project, and stated that they will take time to research the issue before deciding on any type of action.

Mayor Farmer reported that a Mercer County culvert repair had recently taken place at the location of Windwood Road.

Finally, Mayor Farmer stated that several members of Council attended a recent Trenton Water Works meeting, which was well attended, and contained good questions and rich dialogue. She relayed that she brought back a handout from the meeting that she found helpful, and expressed that it would be made available to the public. Mayor Farmer reported that Council received a letter from Senator Shirley K. Turner regarding this issue, which included an expression of thanks to Council for supporting a regional water authority, and acknowledged that municipalities, state agencies, and affected residents should have the opportunity to provide input and review proposals before decisions are finalized, and agreed that all residents should have safe, reliable, and affordable drinking water. Senator Turner stated that she is continuing to review and monitor this matter as discussions progress to ensure that the final outcome serves the best interests of all residents.

Councilman Bobbitt asked Mayor Farmer if Council could get a copy of the PowerPoint presentation given by the Mayor's Task Force, to which Mayor Farmer replied that yes, she would make a note of that.

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There being no further business to come before this Council, the meeting adjourned at 8:32 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by,

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Tonya D. Carter, Municipal Clerk

Attest:

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Patricia Farmer, Mayor