

LAWRENCE TOWNSHIP COUNCIL
LAWRENCE TOWNSHIP MUNICIPAL BUILDING
COUNCIL MEETING ROOM – UPPER LEVEL

May 6, 2025

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

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

Mayor Farmer began the meeting by thanking all of the candidates present who are seeking to fill the remainder of former Councilman John Ryan's term, stating that Lawrence Township is fortunate to have community members who are willing to be active participants in democracy, and willing to run and represent the community.

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, May 6, 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, Perry and Mayor Farmer.
Absent: None.

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

Special Proclamations, Recognitions and Presentations

Mayor Farmer stated that Council interviewed three individuals this evening to fill the vacancy created by the departure of Councilman John Ryan. The Nominees were Joseph Forte, Mitchell Manzella and Amanda Santos. Mayor Farmer wished to clarify, for the record, that Council did not have an Executive Session, as was stated on the Agenda.

On a motion by Councilman Bobbitt, seconded by Councilman Kownacki, the appointment of Amanda Santos to the Council vacancy was approved on the following roll call vote:

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

Attorney Arthur Sypek stated that an issue was brought up as to whether or not Ms. Santos could serve simultaneously with regard to the Lawrence Township School Board and Lawrence Township Council, and relayed that, under the New Jersey statute, she cannot do so. Therefore, he indicated that Ms. Santos has resigned immediately from the Lawrence Township School Board, which was verbally confirmed by Ms. Santos.

Ms. Santos was sworn in by Mercer County Clerk, Paula Sollami Covello. Also in attendance were Assemblywomen Verlina Reynolds-Jackson and Tennille R. McCoy.

Public Safety Subcommittee Presentation

Mr. Raymond Nagy, Deputy Chief of Operations for the Lawrence Township Fire Department, stated that he has been a resident of Lawrence Township for over forty years, and a volunteer firefighter for thirty-two years, as well as a member of the Lawrence Township Public Safety Subcommittee. He stated that tonight he will provide an update regarding the subcommittee's progress with respect to the new Fire Study initiative.

He reviewed that the Township released a public Request For Proposal (RFP) for bids from qualified firms to assess and evaluate the feasibility of centralizing and/or consolidating Township fire and emergency medical services, recommend staffing levels, prepare an analysis for future personnel development, evaluate response times based on current conditions, and recommend potential improvements.

Mr. Nagy disclosed that seven proposals were submitted, which the subcommittee evaluated using a rubric that they developed to ensure the bids met the minimum published RFP requirements. The criteria used to evaluate the proposals included depth and breadth of the knowledge and experience of the firm, the proposal presentation and overall content, project understanding, consultant and firm team members who would be assigned to the project, the professional diversity and qualification of the experts, the proposed scope and analysis of the detailed project task plans, the timeline of the project, and overall budget and cost to be incurred.

He shared that each member of the subcommittee had the opportunity to read through each proposal and evaluate them individually, then convened to discuss and rate the proposals based on the criteria. Mr. Nagy stated that the top three proposals identified, along with the firm the group agreed was the preferred candidate, are as follows:

Center For Government Research (CGR), Center For Public Safety And Management (CPSM), and H2M, an architectural and engineering firm, with the preferred firm being CGR. He indicated that, although the top three proposals were comparable and relatively close in cost, CGR was the strongest candidate. Mr. Nagy explained that they are a nonprofit consulting firm with a multitude of local government researchers on staff, and have local project experience.

The next steps proposed by Mr. Nagy are that Council will first discuss and vote on the firm to receive the bid award, and then identify and implement a project team.

Councilwoman Perry stated that the Councilmembers will be given the top three proposals to review. Ms. Perry recounted that the members of the subcommittee are comprised of experts in fire, safety and EMS, and reiterated that CGR was chosen due to their substantial experience with similar towns, and the fact that they are a nonprofit, which she feels brings a greater sense of responsibility and accountability.

Councilman Bobbitt asked Ms. Perry if she would be able to provide Council with both the RFP, as well as the rubric, in order to guide them in reading the proposals, to which Ms. Perry agreed.

Mayor's Task Force Presentation

Heather Berman, member of the Mayor's Task Force, stated that she is here tonight to update Council on the progress regarding the Lawrence Township Community Center. She disclosed that they have met regularly to craft a broad and inclusive outreach strategy, with priority given to a diverse, cross-section of the community, which has manifested in emails, flyers, newspaper articles, individual and group meetings, a community survey, and a radio segment. She relayed that the Task Force will hold a community meeting on May 13th at the Lawrence Township High School to advise Council on community concerns, revisit the Center's mission, ensure decisions reflect Township-wide needs, and preserve the Center's legacy. Ms. Berman reported that the Community Survey will close on May 15th at 11:59 p.m., and there will be a non-binding date of June 4th, 2025 to report the findings to Council.

The next steps proposed by Ms. Berman, taking place after the May 13th community meeting, will be for the Task Force to analyze the survey responses and input from the meeting, draft a report consisting of concerns, priorities and recommendations, propose both a mission statement and vision for the Center, offer actionable guidance that honors both the Center's legacy as well as its emergent needs, and present findings and recommendations to Town Council.

Public Participation

Mr. Paul Warren welcomed Councilwoman Santos, and thanked Council, the Township Manager, Township Clerk, and Township Attorney for affording him the opportunity to speak. He stated that Township Clerk, Tonya Carter, has done an outstanding job, and he is very happy to see her continuing in her position. Next, he thanked Mr. Raymond Nagy for his presentation, as well as Councilwoman Perry and all members of the Fire Study Subcommittee. He expressed that he hopes Council will find a solution that not only protects Township residents and first responders, but also considers alternative locations and the impact on the quality of life for residents living near any current or future fire station.

Ms. Catherine MacDuff, former Lawrence Township Councilmember, congratulated Amanda Santos on her appointment to Council. She wished to thank the Mayor and to the head of Public Works for responding to her complaint within 24 hours regarding a dangerous situation in her neighborhood, and for sending Public Works personnel to clear up the chunks of concrete, metal rebar and general debris in the area. She also asked whether there is an estimated timeline for the RFP to provide specifications for the Community Center upgrades, questioning if this is dependent on the results of the Task Force's community engagement survey or on the engineer's input.

Mr. Nerwinski responded that they are waiting for Council to determine how the Community Center will be used, in order to have a better understanding of what type of renovations will be needed. Additionally, Mayor Farmer stated that there have been discussions with a firm with regard to what is needed to bring the building up to code, for ADA, etc.

Review and Revisions of Agenda

On a motion by Mr. Bobbitt, seconded by Mr. Kownacki, the Agenda was amended to add 195-25 (18.H.8) - Resolution Amending Resolution 394-25 the Mayor's Taskforce to include members of the Recreation Advisory Committee.

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

Adoption of Minutes

On a motion by Mr. Bobbitt, seconded by Mr. Kownacki, the Minutes of the Regular Meeting of January 21, 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						X
Ms. Perry	X						
Ms. Santos					X		
Mayor Farmer	X						

Awarding or Rejecting of Bids

There was no award or rejection of bids.

Introduction of Ordinances

Mayor Farmer read by title, an ordinance entitled, "ORDINANCE APPROPRIATING \$3,022,500 FROM THE CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT FUND FOR VARIOUS CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS IN AND BY THE TOWNSHIP OF LAWRENCE, IN THE COUNTY OF MERCER, NEW JERSEY".

Mr. Nerwinski reported that in NJ Budget Law, there are two steps to the process. The first step is funding the capital improvements through adopting the Municipal Budget, and the second step is authorizing the use of the money for the detailed purpose. These are capital improvement items that were in the Municipal Budget that was adopted earlier this year.

The Ordinance No. 2492-25 was approved on the following roll call vote:

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

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Mayor Farmer read by title, an ordinance entitled, "ORDINANCE PROVIDING FOR VARIOUS ROAD IMPROVEMENTS (MILL AND OVERLAY INCLUDING ALL WORK AND MATERIALS) IN AND BY THE TOWNSHIP OF LAWRENCE, IN THE COUNTY OF MERCER, NEW JERSEY, APPROPRIATING \$2,497,825 IN CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT FUNDS".

Mr. Nerwinski reported that this relates to the Township's road improvement program. He stated that the Township is simply complying with the NJ Budget Law and executing our improvement program.

The Ordinance No. 2493-25 was approved on the following roll call vote:

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

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Mayor Farmer read by title, an ordinance entitled, "AN ORDINANCE AMENDING ORDINANCE NO. – 2473-24 SALARY ORDINANCE OF THE TOWNSHIP OF LAWRENCE – UNCLASSIFIED AND/OR EXEMPT, SEASONAL, EMERGENCY (NON-UNION) EMPLOYEES FOR 2023-2025".

Mr. Nerwinski reported that this Ordinance addresses three items. He stated the first item is that efforts to hire a Treasurer through NJ Civil Service have been unsuccessful, so the Township's needs are being addressed in the Finance Department by adding the title of *Auditor Accountant Trainee*. He relayed that the second item is that the Township is formally adding the VIP Uniform Allowance compensation and Volunteer Deputy Chief Stipend to the Ordinance. Finally, the third item Mr. Nerwinski revealed is that, pursuant to Federal law, all municipalities in New Jersey are required to designate an *Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Coordinator*. He explained that, in lieu of hiring an employee to comply with the law, Mr. Whitehead's responsibilities will be expanded to include this responsibility and title, and he will receive the associated stipend.

Discussion ensued between Mr. Nerwinski and Council regarding the stipend amount, the fact that there is no certification needed for the ADA Coordinator, and the fact that, occasionally, an employee is asked to perform a task that is separate and apart from their job description, and a stipend is offered for this additional work.

The Ordinance No. 2494-25 was approved on the following roll call vote:

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

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Mayor Farmer read by title, an ordinance entitled, "AN ORDINANCE AMENDING THE CONSOLIDATED LICENSE, PERMIT AND FEE CHAPTER OF THE LAWRENCE TOWNSHIP ADMINISTRATIVE CODE".

Mr. Nerwinski reported that this Ordinance addresses two items. The first item is that there is an added registration fee of \$50.00 for the state law that mandates NJ municipalities to register Landlords and collect insurance certificates for rental properties. The second item memorializes the \$20.00 fee for returned checks for tax payments to the Tax Collector only.

The Ordinance No. 2495-25 was approved on the following roll call vote:

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

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Mayor Farmer read by title, an ordinance entitled, " AN ORDINANCE AMENDING ORDINANCE NO. 2418-22 ESTABLISHING RATES FOR SEWER SERVICE".

Mr. Nerwinski reported that this adds additional language to the Ordinance, as there are times when residents are unaware that the current billing is actually based on previous metered water consumption, so language was added to make the Ordinance clearer.

The Ordinance No. 2496-25 was approved on the following roll call vote:

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

Adoption of Ordinances

Mayor Farmer read by title, an ordinance entitled, "AN ORDINANCE AMENDING ORDINANCE NO. 2084-11 AMENDING CHAPTER 15 ARTICLE I OF THE LAWRENCE TOWNSHIP ADMINISTRATIVE CODE ENTITLED 'GROWTH AND REDEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE'" – Addition of Student Representative.

Ordinance No. 2491–25

AN ORDINANCE AMENDING ORDINANCE NO. 2084-11 AMENDING CHAPTER 15 ARTICLE I OF THE LAWRENCE TOWNSHIP ADMINISTRATIVE CODE ENTITLED 'GROWTH AND REDEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE'

BE IT ORDAINED by the Township Council of the Township of Lawrence, County of Mercer, State of New Jersey that Article I of the Lawrence Township Administrative Code entitled 'Growth and Redevelopment Committee' be and is hereby amended as follows:

Sec. 15-2 Membership

D. Student Representative. The Growth & Redevelopment Committee seek to engage active participation from (1) one student with the following requirements:

- 1) The position is open to any Lawrence resident currently in Grade 9 through Grade 11. Attending a Lawrence high school. This opportunity will be communicated to the guidance counselors at each high school in Lawrence. The chair of the Growth and Redevelopment Committee will be the supervisor and monitor the student.
- 2) The term of the position would be the school year. A committee member from the Growth and Redevelopment team will interview the students and make recommendations to council for the Appointment.
- 3) The student will be a non-voting member of the committee.
- 4) The requirements will be an application and a reference.

Section 2. Repealer

All ordinances or parts of same inconsistent with any provisions of this ordinance are hereby repealed to the extent of such inconsistency.

Section 3. Severability

If any section, paragraph, sentence, clause or phrase of this ordinance shall be declared invalid for any reason, the remaining portions of said ordinance shall not be affected thereby and shall remain in full force and effect.

Section 4. Effective Date

This ordinance shall take effect twenty (20) days after adoption thereof.

New Material Underlined_____
Deletions { }

Adopted: May 6, 2025

The Ordinance No. 2491-25 was approved on the following roll call vote:

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

Manager's Report –

Mr. Nerwinski reported that he and Lawrence Township Engineer, Jim Parvesse, held a conference call with the Hopewell business administrator regarding Federal Point Boulevard. He noted that they are confident about moving forward with NJDOT on the installation of a traffic light, which is important for Lawrence Township residents, though Hopewell and Ewing will not participate. He added that required study work from the NJDOT review must be completed before the project can proceed.

Attorney's Report –

There was no attorney report.

Clerk's Report –

Ms. Carter stated that May 20th is the Voter's Registration deadline. She also mentioned that her previously scheduled retirement date has passed, and she will remain as Lawrence Township Municipal Clerk, and is "happy to be here looking at all of the beautiful faces out there."

Unfinished Business –

There was no unfinished business.

New Business –

Councilman Bobbitt wished to bring attention to the fact that there are three women currently on Council. He stated that he believes that this may be the first time this has taken place within Lawrence Township, to which audience members spontaneously and enthusiastically applauded.

Public Participation (3-minute limitation per speaker) –

Dr. Ramon Lizardo stated that it was genuinely good to see Ms. Carter, and hoped that she would never retire. He then requested that the rubric and RFP regarding the Fire Study initiative be shared with the public, to which Mr. Sypek stated that it is a public document and can be made available through the Municipal Clerk's office. Mr. Lizardo also commented that several towns have been served by CGR and the outcome of their studies was the consolidation of their firehouses. He stated that this resulted in an official claim made by a New York assemblywoman, which is information that he felt should be taken into account and put into record.

Councilwoman Perry thanked Dr. Lizardo for his comments stating that they will review his information. However, she stated that the subcommittee, through their review process, is already aware of the what had taken place in the other townships.

Mayor Farmer stated that it appears the Council meeting has gone offline, and relayed that this may have something to do with current weather conditions.

Mr. Jim Cleak welcomed Ms. Santos to Council, and stated he was happy to see Ms. Carter back again. He shared that he has been information-seeking regarding the Community Center, and feels that it should not be limited in its use. Mr. Cleak offered the opinion that it should not be an "all or nothing" situation between having the Recreation Department be involved, versus how the Center was used in the past.

Mayor Farmer stated that she and Councilman Kownacki will be discussing additional information regarding the Community Center, and stated that the Mayor's Task Force and Recreation Department have met to share ideas pertaining to their vision for the Community Center.

Councilman Kownacki stated that the Recreation Advisory Committee met with the Mayor's Task Force approximately one week ago, and have come to an agreement to increase the Mayor's Task Force by two additional people. He relayed that this was an idea embraced by the current members of the group.

Resolutions

Resolution Nos. 179-25 (18-A.1) though 194-25 (18-H.7) were approved, with the exception of 191-25 (18-H.4), 192-25 (18-H.5), 194-25 (18-H.7), by the following roll call vote:

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

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

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Resolution No. 191-25 (18-H.4) - Authorizing the Re-appointment of Tonya D. Carter as Municipal Clerk, was approved by the following roll call vote:

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

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

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Resolution No. 192-25 (18-H.5) - Authorizing the Township to Enter into Use and Hold Harmless Agreement with the Township of Hamilton for Use of Firing Range, was approved by the following roll call vote:

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

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

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Resolution No. 194-25 (18-H.7) - Authorizing a Closed Session of Council Immediately Following the Regular Meeting to Discuss Matters Dealing with Litigation, Land Acquisition (Open Space), Personnel Matters, and Contract Negotiations, was approved by the following roll call vote:

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

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

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Resolution No. 195-25 (18-H.8) - Resolution Amending the Mayor's Taskforce to Include Members of the Recreation Advisory Committee, was approved by the following roll call vote:

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

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

Council Initiatives/Liaison Reports –

Mayor Farmer wished to report that the *250th Lawrence Committee* (a committee created by Resolution to celebrate the 250th anniversary of the United States of America) met this past weekend to discuss initial plans and recommendations, with valuable input by Superintendent of Recreation Director Nancy Bergen, and plans for a George Washington-related kickoff from The Historical Society.

Mayor Farmer relayed that the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Committee are committed to sponsoring a Juneteenth Celebration once again, which will take place this year on Wednesday, June 18th, at either ten or eleven in the morning.

Mayor Farmer also reported that the Planning Board met last night to discuss the Master Plan as it relates to Lawrence Township's Affordable Housing obligations, which has a deadline of June 30, 2025.

Councilman Kownacki wished to remind Council that on May 24, 2025, there will be a Memorial Day Service which will begin at the Lawrence Township High School, and end at Veteran's Park. He stated that all Councilmembers are invited to participate in this event, and asked if Mayor Farmer could give a short speech, to which Mayor Farmer agreed.

Councilman Kownacki also wished to recognize the two members of the Recreation Committee who were appointed to the Mayor's Task Force. He stated that the two members chosen were Ms. Bonnie Giglio and Mr. William Chester.

Written Communications –

Councilwoman Perry stated that the Memorial Day Celebration at the Greenwood Cemetery will take place on May 25, 2025 at 11:00 a.m., at 1800 Hamilton Avenue, Hamilton, NJ.

Mayor Farmer reported that a letter was received from the Arbor Day Foundation stating that Lawrence Township has earned the *2024 Tree City USA Recognition*.

There being no further business to come before this Council, the meeting adjourned at 7:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by,

Tonya D. Carter, Municipal Clerk

Attest:

Patricia Farmer, Mayor