

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

April 15, 2025

The following are the Minutes of a Regular Meeting of the Lawrence Township Council that was held on Tuesday, April 15, 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 reminding those present that April 15th is Tax Day. She then read the following inspiration, "Now is the time in spring, for a symbol of hope, renewal and new life, offering a chance for reflection and celebration with family." She then thanked the Recreation and Police Departments for the beautiful Easter Egg Hunt that took place on Saturday, and stated that it was an honor to attend, and more importantly, to see the young children enjoy such a joyous occasion.

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, April 15, 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 Kownacki, Perry and Mayor Farmer.

Absent: Councilmembers Bobbitt and Ryan.

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

Special Proclamations, Recognitions and Presentations

Councilwoman Olympia Perry stated that the Public Safety Subcommittee Report will not be presented this evening, as the presenter has the flu. She relayed that it will be presented at the May 6th meeting.

Mayor Farmer stated that, in its place, there will be a presentation by Martha Friend, Secretary of the Mayor's Task Force.

Martha Friend began with a progress report to update Council, Manager Nerwinski and the public on the Community Center developments, regarding Resolution No. 346-24. She reviewed the reasons why Council initially established the Task Force, and the progression of their mission. She then relayed that there will be a Community Engagement Meeting beginning at 6:30 p.m. on May 13th, located in the Lawrence High School cafeteria, which will be open to the public. In addition to this public meeting, Ms. Friend disclosed that the Task Force has created a community survey that will collect both quantitative and qualitative data regarding the preferred uses of the Center. The Task Force, she reported, is using print and digital media, along with radio to reach as many Township residents as possible, and working with the Recreation Department as well, to ensure their voices are also heard regarding Community Center ideas.

Melissa Clark, Growth and Redevelopment Committee Chairperson, addressed Council, Manager Nerwinski, and Clerk Tonya Carter, and began her presentation by announcing that the Committee will hold a networking event that will be held at the library on April 30, 2025, at 5:45 p.m. She relayed that there will be keynote speakers and networking opportunities available. Ms. Clark also informed Council that the Committee is looking to add a student representative, and they have created a Google-form application, open to any Lawrence Township student from ninth through eleventh grade, who would be interested in being a part of the Growth and Redevelopment Committee. However, she noted that they will not be a voting member of the Committee, but simply a member who can offer ideas and have a voice within the Committee. She relayed that their hope is to distribute applications in May, with interviews to follow in June, and have the position filled by the beginning of summer.

Public Participation

Mr. Eric Puliti wished to speak first, and relayed that he believes many have come to tonight's meeting for the same purpose. He expressed that he has gotten to know many Township residents through the "contentious" Council meetings. Mr. Puliti stated that there is a unifying threat, which he characterized as "redlining," and described the line as coalescing around Interstate 295 and intersecting at Route 1. He suggested that this is an intentional action by the Township Manager and Community Development Director. Mr. Puliti relayed that he is Vice Chair of the Lawrence Township Democratic Committee, and at a recent meeting, pointed out that the Township maintains a policy of arbitrarily enforcing residential codes while allowing businesses to violate the Town's land use ordinances, and disclosed that Councilman Bobbitt shared Mr. Puliti's opinion with regard to similar matters pertaining Trenton Block. In closing, Mr. Puliti shared that Council should say no to Resolution 175-25, which would authorize the Mayor to execute the NJDEP application for the RPM Development, LLC, as he believes this to be

unnecessary, and feels that Council does not know enough about the RPM project to make this decision.

Mayor Farmer expressed that she disagrees with Mr. Puliti's earlier comment, stating that she does not feel the Council meetings are "contentious," but rather democracy at work. She declared that all residents have a right to express their concerns regarding their community, and Council is here to listen. She indicated that that she does not necessarily agree with his other opinions, either, acknowledging that he spoke some very strong words, but countered that Council is doing their due diligence regarding this matter.

Councilman James Kownacki addressed Mr. Puliti, stating that Councilman Bobbitt is not present tonight to respond to the comment that he agreed with Mr. Puliti's opinion pertaining to Trenton Block.

Mr. Greg Puliti stated that he feels the two biggest issues that have been discussed at Council meetings over the past two years have been related to Trenton Block and the RPM Land Use approval. He suggested there have been conflicts of interest and selective Code enforcement involving the two projects, and believes, specifically, that RPM was chosen without any competitive proposals to be the recipient of over one million dollars in Township funds for the project. Mr. Puliti relayed his belief that Lawrence Township has a problem with regard to its land use decisions, and the current Council is in denial of this problem.

Mr. Tom Ritter, member of Friends of Colonial Lake Park, thanked Council and Manager Nerwinski for supporting Colonial Lake Park, the local neighborhoods, and the larger Lawrence Community, specifically by drafting and passing Resolution 146-25 in opposition to the planned Ewing Lawrence Sewerage Authority (ELSA) sewer line path passing through Colonial Lake Park.

Mr. Steven Buffa stated that Council is being asked to endorse the NJDEP application regarding RPM Development LLC, and the crux of this plan, he relayed, is based on their Storm Water Site Management Plan. He shared that the preliminary application, submitted in April of 2020, had existing storm water runoff measured at approximately 6.5 cubic feet per second, while the updated Storm Water Management Plan increased the storm water runoff to 7.9 cubic feet. As the existing conditions on the site have not changed, he surmised that the storm water detention system had been redesigned to meet the required percentages. He believes that something is wrong with this DEP application, and feels strongly that Council should not vote on Resolution 175-25 until the Township Engineer has the opportunity to review the changes.

Mr. Ken Kiernan first expressed that he is upset Councilman Ryan has missed yet another Council meeting, although he was seen earlier in the parking lot. Next, Mr. Kiernan stated that Council is responsible to support and help approximately 33,000 residents; however, over the past several Council meetings, he has witnessed what he believes to be Councilman Ryan listening to "special interests." At tonight's meeting, Mr.

Kiernan relayed, he listened to Mr. Puliti speak about how the Township has spent millions of dollars, but countered that while Mr. Puliti was on Town Council, Heritage Village was sold at a half-million dollars PLUS loss to the wife of Trenton's Mayor Palmer for development. Mr. Kiernan commented that while Mr. Puliti was also on Town Council, he was responsible for not allowing Capital Health Systems to come to Lawrence, failing to allow the residents to decide if they would like a hospital in their Township. He stated that Mr. Puliti intimidated Manager Nerwinski and Council are being irresponsible, yet the Township has had a surplus over the last eight years while Mr. Nerwinski was Township Manager. In closing, Mr. Kiernan reiterated that Council is here to support all Township residents, not just special interests.

Dr. Ramon Lizardo remarked that both the Council and the community have made significant progress since the earlier meetings he attended, noting a sense of growth and increased maturity. He expressed his appreciation for many of the Council's actions, including their decision not to raise taxes and their respectful handling of the budget, and values having someone on the Council with a financial background. He shared that, although this is the first he is hearing of the RPM issue, he will take time to look into the matter, but feels confident that Council has thoroughly vetted the process. He addressed Councilman Kownacki, informing him that he respects him for his military service, but was unhappy with the way he responded to Mr. Eric Puliti's comments. Finally, Mr. Lizardo remarked that he brought documentation listing all of the Senior Executives involved in the first three Fire Studies to provide to Councilwoman Perry for review.

Councilman Kownacki responded that he was merely defending Councilman Bobbitt as he was not present at tonight's meeting.

Ms. Kathleen Rickard shared her thoughts regarding the Johnson Trolley Plan. While the Township's online survey includes questions about the trail, she expressed concern that a portion of the trail, specifically where the original Johnson Trolley Tracks were located, appears to have already been predetermined. Ms. Rickard objected to this plan, noting that the proposed segment would run directly behind her backyard. She raised several environmental and safety concerns that she believes have not been adequately addressed. Although Ms. Rickard has submitted feedback through the survey, she suggested an alternative plan: rather than constructing a new bridge over Route 295 and incorporating the original Johnson Trolley Trail, the Township should consider routing the trail along the high-tension wire path, an area she believes is less environmentally sensitive and more suitable for development.

Mayor Farmer stated that before she closes the Public Participation portion of the meeting, she would like to make a statement regarding the RPM Development Resolution. She clarified that the Resolution before Council tonight simply states that Lawrence Township is supporting the application for the connection to the sanitary sewer system, and does not give RPM the authority to move forward with the project.

Councilwoman Perry remarked that it is good that they are engaging in a process where everyone can come and speak their mind and have their concerns heard.

However, she would like to communicate that although she and Mayor Farmer were not a part of the original situation, they are here to move forward, together with Council, to make sure the best decisions are made for Lawrence Township. She recapped that the RPM Development application first went before the Zoning Board, and made clear that Council is not involved with the Zoning Board. When they approved it, Ms. Perry relayed, there was no challenge or appeal filed, and this would have been the time for residents to have stepped up to do something. As there were no appeals, she continued, the Council that existed at that time approved the next step. Ms. Perry wished to make clear that Council has no jurisdiction over the Ewing Lawrence Sewage Authority (ELSA), nor the NJDEP for this to move forward, and if these entities authorize what next steps should happen, according to their standards, they have the authority to do so. With that being said, she stated that Council is interested in engaging in conversation with residents regarding their concerns so that they can move forward in their best interest.

Review and Revisions of Agenda

On a motion by Ms. Perry, seconded by Mr. Kownacki, the Agenda was amended to add Resolution 178-25 to authorize the appointment of Tamala Fleming to the DEI Committee, and to revise Resolution 18.F.1 to correct the typo in the account number.

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

Adoption of Minutes

On a motion by Ms. Perry, seconded by Mr. Kownacki, the Minutes of the Regular Meeting of January 7, 2025 were approved without corrections on the following roll call vote:

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

Awarding or Rejecting of Bids

On a motion by Ms. Perry, seconded by Mr. Kownacki, Resolution (9-A), Authorizing Awarding of Bid to Silviu Nedelcu Painting and Remodeling for the Rehabilitation of 50 Merritt Drive, was presented for adoption.

Mr. Nerwinski simply stated that this is a part of Lawrence Township's Affordable Housing Rehabilitation Program.

Resolution No. 166-25

WHEREAS, on Tuesday, April 1, 2025, bids were received and publicly opened for the rehabilitation of 50 Merritt Drive; and

WHEREAS, five (5) bids were received and reviewed by the appropriate Township Officials; and

WHEREAS, the lowest responsible bidder was Silviu Nedelcu Painting and Remodeling that submitted a bid in the amount of \$29,000.00 to perform the tasks required in the rehabilitation; and

WHEREAS, in accordance with N.J.A.C. 5:50-14, a Certificate of Availability of Funds has been provided and the account to be charged is:

Acct.	Ord. No.	Name	Amount
5-19-56-853-299	-----	Affordable Housing Trust Fund	\$25,000.00

; and

WHEREAS, the owners, Joseph & Laurie Emde will contribute \$4,000.00 in the form of a cashier's check to include the additional options; and

WHEREAS, Silviu Nedelcu Painting and Remodeling has performed satisfactorily; and

WHEREAS, Joseph & Laurie Emde have been deemed eligible to participate in the rehabilitation program;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Township Council of the Township of Lawrence, County of Mercer, State of New Jersey, that pursuant to the recommendations of the Municipal Manager, the Mayor and the Municipal Clerk hereby authorize the acceptance of the bid and the execution of a contract with Silviu Nedelcu

Painting and Remodeling, 4475 Route 27, Princeton, NJ 08540 for the purpose of rehabilitating 50 Merritt Drive.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Municipal Manager is hereby authorized to draft the necessary agreement, subject to the approval of the Municipal Attorney as to form and content thereof.

Adopted: April 15, 2025

Ayes: Councilmembers Kownacki, Perry and Mayor Farmer.

Nays: None.

Absent: Councilmembers Bobbitt and Ryan.

Abstain: None.

Introduction of Ordinances

Mayor Farmer read by title, an ordinance entitled, "ORDINANCE AMENDING ORDINANCE NO. 2084-11 AMENDING CHAPTER 15 ARTICLE 1 OF THE LAWRENCE TOWNSHIP ADMINISTRATIVE CODE ENTITLED "GROWTH AND REDEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE" – Addition of Student Representative.

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

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

Adoption of Ordinances

There was no adoption of ordinances.

Manager's Report –

Township Manager Kevin Nerwinski submitted invoice listings for the month of April 2025 in the amount of \$1,267,765.67.

Attorney's Report –

There was no attorney report.

Clerk's Report –

Ms. Carter stated that Financial Disclosures are due April 30th. She would like to remind everyone that tomorrow is the deadline for anyone who wishes to change their party affiliation for the Primary Election. The Mail-In Ballots will be sent out on April 19th, she relayed, and May 20th is the Voter's Registration deadline. Finally, Ms. Carter reported that she has just received information regarding the Division of Alcoholic Beverage Control (ABC) 2025-2026 license renewals, which she will begin preparing for the new year.

Unfinished Business –

There was no unfinished business.

New Business –

There was no new business.

Public Participation (3-minute limitation per speaker) –

Mr. Eric Puliti asked if the public is able to know the address or location of the potential land sale that will be discussed in closed session, to which Township Attorney, Arthur Sypek, responded that they are unable to reveal this information at this time.

Mr. Steven Buffa stated that he wished to make clear that he understands the Township is not "approving" the DEP, but rather deferring to them. He asked if he is correct in stating that what this developer is asking of Council tonight is to have the Mayor endorse this application.

Mr. Sypek stated that tonight's resolution is to allow the application to move forward to the ELSA board and the NJDEP. He explained that it is not "endorsing" the application, but rather it is permitting the application to move forward for review by the professionals at ELSA and the professionals at the NJDEP. Mr. Sypek clarified that this

Council is not giving any opinion or validity with regard to the storm water management issues that Mr. Buffa had referred to in the earlier Public Participation portion of the meeting.

Further discussion ensued regarding the Lawrence Township Engineer having previously viewed this information prior to this point in the process, and the possibility of having tonight's vote postponed.

Mr. Ken Kiernan addressed Mayor Farmer, pointing out that she earlier stated Council's sole responsibility is the Budget. He suggested that the Budget is simply an avenue of Council's responsibility for the representation of the Township; the Budget is the vehicle to present and pass for the safety and representation of Township residents.

Mayor Farmer corrected Mr. Kiernan, explaining that it was Councilwoman Perry who had made the statement to which he was referring.

Resolutions

Resolution Nos. 167-25 (18-D.1) though 168-25 (18-D.2) were approved by the following roll call vote:

COUNCIL	AYE	NAY	PRESENT	ABSENT	ABSTAIN	MOVE	SECOND
Mr. Bobbitt				X			
Mr. Kownacki	X						X
Ms. Perry	X					X	
Mr. Ryan				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 Nos. 169-25 (18-F-1) though 172-25 (18-F.4) were approved by the following roll call vote:

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

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

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A discussion ensued between Mayor Farmer and Mr. Nerwinski, with regard to the RPM Resolution, pertaining to ELSA and the DEP, with Mr. Nerwinski explaining that Township Engineers have reviewed the application and provided recommendations to the Governing Body, while the review of the technical parts of the application are done by ELSA, but primarily, the NJDEP. They agreed that the residents' concerns be included with the application that will be sent to the NJDEP.

Resolution Nos. 173-25 (18-H-1) though 178-25 (18-H.6) were approved by the following roll call vote:

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

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

Council Initiatives/Liaison Reports –

Councilwoman Perry wished to remind everyone that the Growth and Redevelopment Committee is having a business networking event on April 30th at the library from 5:45 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. There will be guest speakers from the Mercer County Office of Economic Development, and she stated that further details can be found on the website.

Mayor Farmer wished to report, on behalf of the Mayor's Task Force, that there will be a community meeting regarding the Lawrence Community Center held at the Lawrence Township High School on May 13th at 6:30 p.m. She encouraged all residents to attend in order to have their voices heard, and reminded everyone that there are flyers regarding the Community Center survey located in the back of the conference room.

Written Communications –

Mayor Farmer wished to publicly acknowledge Ms. Lea Kahn for her Lawrence Ledger article pertaining to the Lewisville Road historical marker, stating that it was a really nice article, and thanking her on behalf of the project committee.

Mayor Farmer reported that she has received a letter regarding "National Lupus Awareness Month," and read the first paragraph of the letter, encouraging everyone to join the fight against this devastating illness.

Mr. Sypek read a hand-delivered letter given to him earlier today from Councilman John Ryan, stating that, due to his ongoing medical conditions, he is resigning from Council effective immediately, along with all of the Boards and Committees.

There being no further business to come before this Council, the meeting adjourned at 7:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by,

Tonya D. Carter, Municipal Clerk

Attest:

Patricia Farmer, Mayor