

MINUTES OF THE BRIDGEWATER TOWNSHIP COUNCIL
February 20, 2025 - COUNCIL CHAMBERS

The Township Council of the Township of Bridgewater, County of Somerset, State of New Jersey, convened in a regular session on Thursday, February 20, 2025, at 7:30 p.m. in Council Chambers in the Municipal Complex, Bridgewater, New Jersey 08807 & via Live Online Broadcast.

Council President Norgalis read the following announcement:

Notice of Meeting

IN COMPLIANCE WITH THE OPEN PUBLIC MEETINGS ACT OF NEW JERSEY, ADEQUATE NOTICE OF THIS MEETING WAS PROVIDED ON DECEMBER 10, 2024, WITH WRITTEN NOTICE AND ELECTRONIC NOTICE PROVIDED TO THE COURIER NEWS AND THE BREEZE POSTING ON THE WEBSITE AND THE BULLETIN BOARD IN THE MUNICIPAL BUILDING AND FILING WITH THE TOWNSHIP CLERK

On call of the roll, the following Council members were present:

Councilman Michael Kirsh
Councilman Allen Kurdyla
Councilman Filipe Pedroso
Councilman Timothy Ring
Council President Howard V. Norgalis

Also Present: Michael Pappas, Township Administrator
Scott Stephens, Deputy Township Administrator
Christopher Corsini, Township Attorney
Grace Njuguna, Township Clerk

Councilman Kirsh led the audience in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Minutes

JANUARY 30, 2025 - REGULAR SESSION

On the motion of Councilman Ring, seconded by Councilman Kurdyla, the January 30, 2025, regular session minutes were moved for approval and passed unanimously on a voice call vote. Councilman Pedroso and Councilman Kirsh abstained from voting due to their absence on that day.

FEBRUARY 6, 2025 - REGULAR SESSION

On the motion of Councilman Ring, seconded by Councilman Kurdyla, the February 6, 2025, regular session minutes were moved for approval and passed unanimously on a voice call vote. Councilman Pedroso abstained from voting due to his absence that day.

JANUARY 30, 2025, AND FEBRUARY 6, 2025 – CLOSED SESSIONS

January 30, 2025, and February 6, 2025, closed session minutes were passed around

for Council approval & signature.

Council Reports

Councilman Kirsh:

- On February 10th, a meeting was held with the Legislative District 23 delegation, including Senator Steinhardt and Assembly Leader DiMaio. Councilman Kirsh raised the issue of potential changes to the municipal land use law, particularly regarding notice requirements. He explained that the discussion focused on possible adjustments, especially in cases where commercial zones border residential areas. Councilman Kirsh highlighted that the impact of such changes could extend beyond the current 200-foot notice requirement.
- Councilman Kirsh also highlighted Bridgewater's commitment to transparency, mentioning the township's specialized newsletter that proactively shares land use board agendas with residents, even though it is not legally required. He suggested that pairing this effort with an expanded notice requirement could further ensure that residents are well-informed about potential changes affecting their neighborhoods.
- The Zoning Board met on February 11th to review an application from Visions and Pathways, which is proposing a second building near its current location by the Bridgewater Post Office. The Planning Board met the previous night for the purpose of passing resolutions, without conducting hearings.
- Councilman Kirsh concluded by acknowledging the work of the township staff in updating the township's emblem for display on screens in council chambers and online. While Bridgewater does not have an official logo, he explained that the adaptation of the emblem is designed to celebrate the upcoming 250th anniversary of the United States in July 2026. The township intends to use this adapted emblem as part of its efforts to recognize and commemorate the historic milestone.

Councilman Kurdyla:

- Councilman Kurdyla reported that all four fire districts in Bridgewater passed their budgets in the February fire district elections, with only the final count from the County Board of Elections on late mail-in ballots pending.
- He also reported that Somerset County is requiring Bridgewater's emergency services to upgrade radios to new frequencies, with an estimated cost of \$5 million for police, fire, and EMS. The township is seeking federal funding with Congressman Kean's help, as the FCC mandated the frequency change. The system is planned to go online by 2026, with equipment ordered by fall 2025. Kurdyla acknowledged the project's complexity and the significant effort involved.

Council President Norgalis: *(verbatim)*

- Happy Post Valentines Day.
- NJ American Water has confirmed that many of their customers will feel that their water tastes salty. This is a direct result of the need for virtually all road departments to salt the road due to the inclement weather. The salt runs off to the Raritan River which is a major source of NJ American water.
- I attended the first quarter of 2025 Local Emergency Planning Council chaired by OEM Head POLICE .Lt. James Edwards. Police officer Brian Sujansky has been named Deputy OEM. Additional paperwork has been requested by FEMA for a previous \$43,000 reimbursement request from the flood. In addition, the previous rejection by FEMA of \$120,000 in costs has been appealed. Emergency Operations plans continued to be developed to meet an Aug 2025 deadline.
- There was a question about insurance coverage for CERT volunteers. Any CERT volunteer involved in a township-initiated activity is covered by our workman's compensation plan. There are OEM meetings planned with Fire and Squad Chiefs to iron out coordination and chain of command issues.
- Those residents who receive a sewer bill will note that there was a bill enclosure indicating that there are three options to pay your sewer or your tax bill. I would call your attention to Option 1 which is Pay Online. This is accessed thru the online payment portal at www.bridgewaternj.gov. HOWEVER, if you use the online portal there is a transaction fee of \$1.95 if using an ACH (Automated Clearing House) payment or 2.95% of the value of the payment if paying by debit card or check. You can avoid an additional fee if you use your bank's online bill pay or simply write and mail or hand deliver your check to the township tax collector.
- Yesterday, along with Councilman Kirsch and Director Tom Genova I attended
- a meeting with a representative from Reiner Pump Systems to discuss some of the performance issues at the Gilbride Sewerage pumping station. This will be the subject of a closed Council meeting at the conclusion of tonight's council meeting.
- Several weeks ago, I reported that a larger stop sign would be installed on Talamini at the Country Club intersection. It has been installed as well as a smaller sign back from the intersection warning of the stop sign at the corner. Still to come will be a street at that intersection. Hopefully, these improvements will improve safety for both cars and pedestrians.

Councilman Pedroso:

- Councilman Pedroso began by mentioning that he missed the last council meeting due to attending the New Jersey Chamber of Commerce's "Walk to Washington, DC" event. This event, which had been paused since COVID, brings together business leaders, politicians, and members of the state legislature for networking and discussions. Councilman Pedroso noted meeting executives from PSEG and New Jersey American Water Company, which could be useful for future Bridgewater events.
- He also shared his attendance at several events, including President Trump's inauguration, the Somerset Patriots' sponsor celebration, and the Martinsville Rescue Squad's 2025 officer installation dinner. He expressed gratitude to the volunteers in the rescue squads who provide vital services to the community.
- Additionally, Councilman Pedroso attended Chinese New Year celebrations at both the Bridgewater Senior Center and Bridgewater Commons. He remarked on the growing attendance each year at these events, which celebrate Chinese culture and traditions.
- Lastly, Councilman Pedroso mentioned watching the Super Bowl, though he was not impressed with the game as he wasn't a fan of either team. Despite that, he enjoyed spending time with friends during the event.

Councilman Ring:

- Councilman Ring shared several updates, beginning with a meeting earlier in the month with Assemblyman DiMaio, Senator Steinhardt, and their staff. He revisited an issue from the December meeting regarding road closures, particularly the lack of communication between state and county officials about closing multiple lanes off Route 202/206 and North Bridge Street during the holiday season. The discussion focused on improving communication about road closures at all government levels.
- Councilman Ring mentioned that the budget committee had been in contact with the administration about this year's budget timeline. This information will become available following the County's certification of assessments later this week.
- Lastly, Councilman Ring read a letter from a Bridgewater resident praising Officer Anthony Mendoza for his professionalism and compassion during a recent traffic accident on Crim Road. The resident described how Officer Mendoza comforted a frightened young man involved in the accident, speaking to him in fluent Spanish and ensuring his safety. Ring expressed appreciation for Officer Mendoza's conduct, emphasizing his kindness and

professionalism.

Mayor's Reports

Michael Pappas, Township Administrator, reported on behalf of Mayor Moench

- Township Administrator Pappas announced that Bridgewater has been invited to participate in the New Jersey State Planning Commission's cross-acceptance process. Somerset County has volunteered to serve as an intermediary, and municipalities can either participate directly or delegate to the county. Bridgewater has opted to participate. The mayor appointed several individuals to represent Bridgewater in this effort, including Councilman Michael Kirsh, Planning Board Chairman Vescio, Zoning Board Chairman Jeff Foose, Assistant Township Attorney Alex Fisher, Township Planner Katherine Sarmad, and Township Engineer Bill Burr. Administrator Pappas shared that a meeting was held recently to review the process, and Ms. Sarmad is currently attending the initial kickoff meeting in Somerville.

Public Comment

Members of the public wishing to address the Council on any matter will be allowed two minutes to speak unless there are unusual circumstances.

On motion of Councilman Kirsh, seconded by Councilman Kurdyla, the meeting was opened to the public for comment.

- **Elizabeth Colucci: 1776 Washington Valley Road - Martinsville, NJ 08836**
Ms. Colucci addressed the council regarding political sign theft in Bridgewater, first raised on September 19, 2024. She reported that over 200 signs, valued at \$10 each, were stolen, with some homes targeted multiple times. She commended Bridgewater police, particularly Officer Mendoza, for their professionalism in handling reports. The investigation led to the apprehension of two juveniles, requiring police resources, confessions, a review by the County Prosecutor's Office, and sentencing, which resulted in community service and partial restitution. She also thanked Chief Mitzak and the officers for their efforts in addressing the issue.
- **Anda Cytroen: Martinsville section, Bridgewater, NJ 08807**
Ms. Cytroen thanked the Police Department's Traffic Bureau for addressing her concerns about traffic safety and signage near Cromwell Park and the trail, emphasizing the need to ensure pedestrian safety in the designated hiking and biking area. She also voiced concerns about the lack of transparency regarding the 2025 budget process, noting that no clear information has been provided to the public about the timeline and process, despite the introduction of a \$5 million unfunded mandate for emergency service radio upgrades. She pointed out that the 2024 municipal budget of \$63 million, including the sewer tax, was only adopted on August 15, 2024, and that there has been no discussion in agendas or minutes regarding the 2025

budget. Additionally, she raised concerns about the lack of updates on the adoption and implementation of the 2024 corrective action plan, questioning the administration's compliance efforts. Emphasizing the township's fiduciary responsibility to its residents, she urged the council president to provide clarity on the expected process and timeline for the 2025 budget.

Council President Norgalis explained that he had spoken with Tax Assessor Anthony DiRado earlier in the day and was informed that the handoff of the township's portion of the budget process, originally planned for that day, had been delayed by the county and was now expected to take place on Monday or Tuesday.

Administrator Pappas clarified that while the tax assessor is a Township employee, the tax assessing function is strictly regulated by the New Jersey State Division of Taxation, leaving the Township Council, Mayor, and administration without control or oversight. He explained that assessment levels are determined through an annual assessment program based on municipal data. Administrator Pappas emphasized that Bridgewater has one of the most competent tax assessors in the state and reminded residents that if they believe their assessment is inaccurate, they have the right to appeal. He encouraged anyone with concerns to reach out to him or Tax Assessor Anthony DiRado.

- **Martha Barrett: Rolling Hills Road section, Bridgewater, NJ 08807**

Ms. Barrett, following an article she read on TAPinto, expressed concern over the rising tax assessments, emphasizing the financial strain it has on her and her husband as they try to remain in Bridgewater on a fixed income. She stressed her love for the district and her past involvement in various committees as a former teacher. Her primary concern was the impact on local schools, specifically referencing the 46 employees who left in the 2023-2024 period due to retirements and layoffs. She inquired about the breakdown between retirements and layoffs, seeking clarification on the numbers. Ms. Barrett further questioned the necessity of hiring nine new supervisors, seeking clarification on their roles and the personnel they oversee, especially in light of the previous staff reductions.

Administrator Pappas clarified that there have been no layoffs in the last few years. He stated that the only layoffs occurred in 2020 when 14 employees were let go due to a decrease in revenue caused by the pandemic.

- **Andrew Bucko: 543 Berrywood Lane, Bridgewater, NJ 08807**

Mr. Bucko, who was quoted in the TAPinto article, followed up on previous comments regarding reduced headcount, explaining that unfilled positions should have resulted in a \$2.4 million payroll surplus. He also pointed out a

\$1.9 million increase in the township's budget for 2024, raising concerns about additional spending and its impact on taxpayers. Bucko highlighted the increase in supervisory staff from 12 to 21 in the 2024 budget and questioned the accuracy of the budget numbers, suggesting the mayor and administration should address any discrepancies.

On motion of Councilman Ring, seconded by Councilman Kirsh, the public comment portion was closed.

**Public
Hearing &
Final Action
Ordinances**

AN ORDINANCE AMENDING CHAPTER 10 (MUNICIPAL COURT), SECTION 10-4 (JUDGE; TERM OF OFFICE) AND SECTION 10-6 (FUNCTIONS, POWERS, DUTIES AND JURISDICTION) OF THE MUNICIPAL CODE OF THE TOWNSHIP OF BRIDGEWATER TO REMOVE OBSOLETE STATUTORY REFERENCES

On motion of Councilman Ring, seconded by Councilman Kurdyla, the meeting was opened to the public.

No one wished to be heard.

On motion of Councilman Ring, seconded by Councilman Kurdyla, the public comment portion was closed.

On motion of Councilman Ring, seconded by Councilman Kurdyla, the foregoing Ordinance was proposed. The vote was as follows:

Councilman Kirsh	Aye
Councilman Kurdyla	Aye
Councilman Pedroso	Aye
Councilman Ring	Aye
Council President Norgalis	Aye

[ORDINANCE #25-02 WAS ADOPTED.](#)

A copy of resolution [#25-02-20-080](#) is appended to the official minutes

AN ORDINANCE SETTING THE COMPENSATION OF THE MAYOR, TOWNSHIP COUNCIL MEMBERS, DEPARTMENT HEADS, AND CERTAIN OTHER MUNICIPAL EMPLOYEES PURSUANT TO CHAPTER 374 OF THE PUBLIC LAWS OF 1985; N.J.S.A. 2A:809; N.J.S.A. 2A:8-13; N.J.S.A. 40A:9-165; N.J.S.A.40A:9-135; N.J.S.A. 40A:9-146, AND CHAPTER 95 OF THE PUBLIC LAWS OF 1996 TO AMEND THE SALARIES OF THE MUNICIPAL COURT JUDGE AND THE COURT CLERK/ADMINISTRATOR TO REFLECT THE TOWNSHIP'S SHARED SERVICE AGREEMENT FOR MUNICIPAL COURT SERVICES WITH THE BOROUGH OF RARITAN

Councilman Ring addressed public questions from the previous meeting, explaining that in early 2024, the judge had a salary of \$115,500 from Bridgewater and \$42,500 from Raritan. After the court merger in October, the \$42,500 salary was pro-rated, resulting in a \$10,625 increase. The additional increase for 2025 reflects the full \$42,500 salary, which is paid by Raritan to Bridgewater, adjusting the judge's salary due to the merger. He noted that the same process applies to the Court Administrator, though with different salary figures.

Councilman Kirsh added that the adjustment reflects the full-year salary, ensuring both individuals are authorized to be paid the correct amount.

On motion of Councilman Ring, seconded by Councilman Kirsh, the meeting was opened to the public.

- **Andrew Bucko: 543 Berrywood Lane, Bridgewater, NJ 08807**

Mr. Bucko asked the council whether it is guaranteed that the municipal judge will not participate in the Bridgewater Health Plan, and what would happen if the judge or a future judge decides to participate. He inquired whether the township has the authority to enforce this decision and whether it is enforceable in the long term.

Council President Norgalis explained that currently, the judge is not participating in the township's benefits plan, and it is uncertain whether this will change in the future. He added that the salary is specific to the current judge, and if a new judge were appointed, the salary would be adjusted accordingly.

On motion of Councilman Ring, seconded by Councilman Kurdyla, the public comment portion was closed.

On motion of Councilman Ring, seconded by Councilman Kurdyla, the foregoing Ordinance was proposed. The vote was as follows:

Councilman Kirsh	Aye
Councilman Kurdyla	Aye
Councilman Pedroso	Aye
Councilman Ring	Aye
Council President Norgalis	Aye

ORDINANCE #25-03 WAS ADOPTED.

A copy of resolution [#25-02-20-081](#) is appended to the official minutes

**Introduction
of Ordinances**

AN ORDINANCE AUTHORIZING THE SALE OF PROPERTY KNOWN AS LOT 15 IN BLOCK 477 ON THE BRIDGEWATER TOWNSHIP TAX MAP AND LOCATED AT 901 ROUTE 202/206 TO NOUVELLE MAIN STREET URBAN RENEWAL, LLC OF P.O. BOX 853, FRANKLIN LAKES, NJ 07417 (BUYER), FOR A NOMINAL CONSIDERATION OF \$100.00 PURSUANT TO N.J.S.A. 40A: 12-21(l) TO CONSTRUCT AFFORDABLE HOUSING. IF THE DEVELOPER IS UNABLE TO MEET CONSTRUCTION COST THROUGH OTHER SOURCES, THE TOWNSHIP MAY CONTRIBUTE UP TO \$150,000 FROM THE AFFORDABLE HOUSING TRUST FUND

On motion of Councilman Kurdyla, seconded by Councilman Ring, the foregoing Ordinance was proposed. The vote was as follows:

Councilman Kirsh	Aye
Councilman Kurdyla	Aye
Councilman Pedroso	Aye
Councilman Ring	Aye
Council President Norgalis	Aye

THE ORDINANCE WAS INTRODUCED.

A copy of resolution [#25-02-20-082](#) is appended to the official minutes

Grace Njuguna, Township Clerk, read the following report:

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the said pending ordinance be passed on first reading and advertised as required by statute fixing the 6th day of March, 2024, at 7:30 p.m. prevailing time on said day as the time and the Bridgewater Township Municipal Court Chambers at 100 Commons Way in said Township as the place for hearing and final action.

FURTHER RESOLVED that the Township Clerk shall forthwith post on the bulletin board in the Township Municipal Building at 100 Commons Way, a true copy of said ordinance and make copies available to members of the general public and spread the same upon the minutes of the meeting.

Resolutions

AUTHORIZING THE EXECUTION OF AN AGREEMENT WITH THE SOMERSET HILLS TENNIS ASSOCIATION, LLC; 128 VAN CLEEF ROAD SOMERSET, NEW JERSEY TO PROVIDE TENNIS AND PICKLEBALL INSTRUCTION FOR BOTH YOUTH AND ADULT PROGRAMS FOR 2025 IN AN AMOUNT NOT TO EXCEED \$50,000.00 TO BE PAID FROM THE RECREATION TRUST FUND ESTABLISHED SPECIFICALLY FOR REGISTRATION FEES COLLECTED FROM PROGRAMS AT NO EXPENSE TO THE TOWNSHIP

On motion of Councilman Ring, seconded by Councilman Kirsh, the foregoing resolution was proposed. The vote was as follows:

Councilman Kirsh	Aye
Councilman Kurdyla	Aye
Councilman Pedroso	Aye
Councilman Ring	Aye
Council President Norgalis	Aye

THE RESOLUTION WAS ADOPTED.

A copy of resolution [#25-02-20-083](#) is appended to the official minutes

CONSENT VOTE

COUNCIL PRESIDENT NORGALIS READ THE FOLLOWING RESOLUTIONS BY TITLE AND ALLOWED FOR DISCUSSIONS/QUESTIONS. HE CALLED FOR A CONSENT MOTION.

AUTHORIZING RELEASE OF THE PERFORMANCE GUARANTEE IN THE AMOUNT OF \$27,770.00, AND ACCEPTANCE OF THE SITE IMPROVEMENTS TO JUSTIN & CHRISTY BITNER, BLOCK 222, LOT 37 & 38, AT 383 UNION AVENUE

AUTHORIZING RELEASE OF THE PERFORMANCE GUARANTEE IN THE AMOUNT OF \$70,007.35, AND ACCEPTANCE OF THE SITE IMPROVEMENTS FOR NJGRP I, LLC (FORMERLY GCP-HYATT HOUSE) BLOCK 400, LOT 7, AT 530 ROUTE 22

AUTHORIZING RELEASE OF THE SAFETY & STABILIZATION BOND IN THE AMOUNT OF \$5,000.00, ACCEPTANCE OF THE SITE IMPROVEMENTS, AND ACCEPTANCE OF THE MAINTENANCE GUARANTEE IN THE AMOUNT OF \$24,630.00 FOR PSE&G, BLOCK 552 LOT 3 AT 961 ROUTE 22

Councilman Ring clarified that the agenda and the resolution for item 12d do not align, and he requested to table item 12d for further review. Item 12d was moved to next meeting.

On motion of Councilman Ring, seconded by Councilman Kirsh, the foregoing resolutions were proposed. The vote was as follows:

Councilman Kirsh	Aye
Councilman Kurdyla	Aye
Councilman Pedroso	Aye
Councilman Ring	Aye
Council President Norgalis	Aye

THE RESOLUTIONS WERE ADOPTED.

Copies of resolutions [#25-02-20-084 thru #25-02-20-085](#) are appended to the official minutes

**Closed
Session**

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Bridgewater Township Council that this body will now hold a closed meeting to discuss litigation and contract negotiations.

When and if the matters discussed become public record, this will be made known to the public at that time.

The public is excluded from said meeting and further notice thereof is dispensed with all in accordance with Sections 8 and 4a of the Open Public Meetings Act.

On the motion of Councilman Ring, seconded by Councilman Kirsh, the Council convened in closed session at approximately 8:21 p.m.

A copy of resolution [#25-02-20-086](#) is appended to the official minutes.

On the motion of Councilman Ring, seconded by Councilman Kirsh, the meeting reconvened to open session at approximately 8:52 p.m. and adjourned immediately thereafter.

Adjournment

On the motion of Councilman Norgalis, seconded by Councilman Kurdyla, the meeting adjourned at approximately 8:53 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Grace Njuguna, RMC
Municipal Clerk

Howard Norgalis
Council President