

COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES – March 2, 2026

The meeting of the Township Council of the Township of Lower, County of Cape May, State of New Jersey was held on March 2, 2026 at 5:00 p.m. in the meeting room of Township Hall, 2600 Bayshore Road, Villas, New Jersey.

The Clerk announced that the meeting was being held in compliance with the Open Public Meetings Act and that adequate notice of the meeting had been provided according to law.

The following members of Council were present for roll call taken by the Clerk:

- Councilmember Thomas Conrad
- Councilmember Joseph Wareham
- Councilmember Roland Roy, Jr.
- Deputy Mayor Kevin Coombs
- Mayor Frank Sippel

Also present: Michael Laffey, Township Manager, Robert Belasco, Township Solicitor and Karen Fournier, Deputy Township Clerk

Work Session

Recognition of Patrolman Romantino & Patrolman Micciche – Mayor Sippel and Chief Vanaman
 On behalf of Lower Township Council, Deputy Mayor Coombs read proclamations presented to Patrolman Micciche and Patrolman Romantino for their brave and heroic act of providing life-saving assistance to Township homeowner Brent Formica.
 Brent Formica, Glencreek Rd., thanked Officer Micciche and Officer Romantino for saving his life during a medical emergency.
 Chief Donald Vanaman read a statement describing the heroic efforts of the Officers during the lifesaving event.

Res. #2026-110 Introduction of the 2026 Budget
 Manager Laffey thanked CFO, James Craft, and department heads for tightening their department budgets in preparation for the Proposed 2026 Municipal Budget. Manager Laffey presented the Budget Message revealing no tax rate increase.
 The Public Hearing is scheduled for April 20, 2026 at 5 p.m. The budget summary will be published in the Cape May Star and Wave and on the Township website. Copies of the budget are available in the Clerk's Office at Township Hall.
 Municipal Auditor, Leon Costello of Ford, Scott & Associates, explained the budget process and informed that this is a State examined budget year. He reiterated the proposed budget is a sound budget that complies with all the caps.
 Mayor Sippel and each member of Council complimented and thanked all parties involved in the budget process.

	MOTION	SECOND	AYE	NAY	RECUSE	ABSTAIN	ABSENT
CONRAD		X	X				
WAREHAM	X		X				
ROY			X				
COOMBS			X				
SIPPEL			X				

Consent Agenda

- Approval of Minutes – February 18, 2026
- Res. #2026-111 Authorization for the Payment of Vouchers \$ \$721,574.01
- Res. #2026-112 Authorization for the Payout of Accumulated Compensatory Time (J.Scheck \$6,841.50)
- Res. #2026-113 A Resolution Requesting Release of Performance Guarantee for LJKQ Real Estate, LLC; BI 712; Lots 3,4,5; Escrow #z23-09-04
- Res. #2026-114 Reappointment to the Zoning Board of Adjustment (G.Bostard)
- Res. #2026-115 Resolution Authorizing the Award of a Non-Fair and Open Contract to Forerunner Industries Inc for Floodplain Management Program
- Res. #2026-116 Reappointment to the Recreation Advisory Board (L.Bedell)
- Res. #2026-117 Reappointment to the Zoning Board of Adjustment (T.Doherty)

- Res. #2026-118 Resolution Authorizing the Continued Use of the Thirty Google Chromebook Laptop Computers by the Lower Township Elementary School District
- Res. #2026-119 Reappointment to the Recreation Advisory Board (N.Young)
- Res. #2026-120 Authorization for the Payout of Accumulated Compensatory Time (S.Gellura \$12,808.00)
- Res. #2026-121 Resolution Authorizing the Adoption of the Purchasing Procedure Guide
- Res. #2026-122 Resolution Authorizing the Adoption of the Fixed Assets Policy
- Res. #2026-123 Resolution Authorizing Expenditure to Johnsons Control Security for a Five (5) Year Maintenance Agreement for Fingerprint Equipment for the Recreation Center under State Contract #24-TELE-74149
- Res. #2026-124 Approving a Professional Service Contract with DeBlasio & Associates for FY2026 NJIB Arctic Avenue Storm Sewer Replacement Project- Construction Phase Services (LT-C-071) (\$95,000)
- Res. #2026-125 Authorization for the Payout of Compensatory Time (T.Shough \$7,906.00)
- Ord. #2026-05 An Ordinance to Exceed the Municipal Budget Appropriation Limits and to Establish a CAP Bank (N.J.S.A. 40A4-15.14)
- This is the first reading of Ordinance #2026-05. The second reading and public hearing has been scheduled for April 6, 2026

	MOTION	SECOND	AYE	NAY	RECUSE	ABSTAIN	ABSENT
CONRAD			X				
WAREHAM	X		X				
ROY			X				
COOMBS		X	X				
SIPPEL			X				

Regular Agenda

- Ord. #2026-02 An Ordinance Amending Chapter 7, Traffic, of the Code of the Township of Lower to Explicitly Prohibit Parking in Front of Public or Private Driveways, Driveway Aprons, Curb Cuts, Or Access Points. This is the second reading and public hearing of this Ordinance. This Ordinance has been posted, published and made available to the public.

	MOTION	SECOND	AYE	NAY	RECUSE	ABSTAIN	ABSENT
CONRAD			X				
WAREHAM		X	X				
ROY	X		X				
COOMBS			X				
SIPPEL			X				

- Res. #2026-126 A Resolution Denying an Application for a Secondhand Merchants and Precious Metals License submitted by Road Show Concepts, LLC

	MOTION	SECOND	AYE	NAY	RECUSE	ABSTAIN	ABSENT
CONRAD		X	X				
WAREHAM			X				
ROY			X				
COOMBS	X		X				
SIPPEL			X				

Call to the Public

Denise Bachofen, 120 Texas Ave, addressed Council to compliment the Public Works Department for an outstanding job clearing the side streets after the snow storm. She also complimented the Police Department for their prompt attention to public safety.

Bill Greenfield, Villas, also complimented Public Works for a great job plowing the roads after the snow.

Brian Dickinson, Bayshore Road, retired Lower Township Patrolman, addressed Council to voice discontent with the changes to the Retiree Health Benefits.

Manager Laffey agreed to meet with Mr. Dickinson to work through the issues with the HR Coordinator and Insurance Broker.

**MANAGER'S ANNUAL BUDGET MESSAGE
2026 BUDGET INTRODUCTION – MARCH 2, 2026**

Council has received a copy of the proposed municipal budget for 2026 and I'm pleased to announce there is no tax rate increase. The tax levy is:

\$24,016,289.12 (Twenty-four Million, Sixteen Thousand, Two Hundred Eighty-Nine Dollars and Twelve Cents) compared to last year's

\$23,874,081.49 (Twenty-three Million, Eight Hundred Seventy-Four Thousand, Eighty-One Dollars and Forty-Nine Cents); an increase of

\$142,207.63 (One Hundred Forty-Two Thousand, Two Hundred Seven Dollars and Sixty-Three Cents).

Our Assessed Valuation increased by:

25,019,510 (Twenty-five Million, Nineteen Thousand, Five Hundred Ten dollars).

We're below the Legal Levy Cap by:

\$568,193 (Five Hundred Sixty-Eight Thousand, One Hundred Ninety-three Dollars)

and below the Legal spending Cap by:

\$355,811.30 (Three Hundred Fifty-Five Thousand Eight Hundred Eleven Dollars and Thirty Cents).

The Township completed 2025 with a surplus of:

\$10,691,503 (Ten Million, Six Hundred Ninety-one Thousand, Five Hundred Three Dollars); *the highest year-end surplus balance to date.*

The increase is largely due to new revenues brought in by occupancy taxes, interest earnings and Construction Code Fees. The tax collection rate for 2025 was 98.86% which helped add over \$1.278M to the surplus. All other revenue collections exceeded projections for 2025 and brought in an additional \$1.25M.

Of that surplus balance \$5,404,315.64 (Five Million, Four Hundred Four Thousand Three Hundred Fifteen Dollars and Sixty-Four Cents) is being applied to this year's budget to help us keep the tax rate level. We feel confident using this amount of surplus because we're well within the parameters of our fund balance policy.

The total Assessed Valuation of Real Property is:

\$3,794,140,600 (Three Billion, Seven Hundred Ninety-Four Million,

One Hundred Forty Thousand Six Hundred Dollars) so approximately every

\$379,414 (Three Hundred Seventy-nine Thousand, Four Hundred and Fourteen Dollars) of the Amount to be Raised by Taxation equals one cent on the tax rate.

This budget uses a 97.75% rate to compute the Reserve for Uncollected Taxes in 2026.

The public hearing is scheduled for April 20th at 5:00 p.m. A budget summary will be published in the Cape May Star & Wave. Copies will be available on the Township website as well as in the Clerk's office at Townhall.

Council Comments

Councilmember Conrad – no comments

Councilmember Wareham wished LCMR Boys Varsity Basketball Team well in the State Semi-Final Tournament.

Councilmember Roy – no comments

Deputy Mayor Coombs gave a shout out to the LCMR Wrestling Team for their well-deserved accomplishments. Individuals will be recognized at the next Council meeting.

Mayor Sippel announced the upcoming Spring Fling and Easter Egg Hunt.

Closed Session

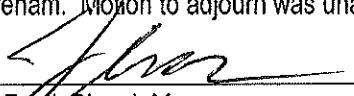
Res. # 2026-127 A Resolution Providing for a Meeting Not Open to the Public in accordance with the provisions of the New Jersey Open Public Meetings Act, NJSA 10:4-12 Attorney/Client Privilege and Personnel


	MOTION	SECOND	AYE	NAY	RECUSE	ABSTAIN	ABSENT
CONRAD			X				
WAREHAM		X	X				
ROY			X				
COOMBS			X				
SIPPEL	X		X				

Council adjourned to closed session at 5:40 p.m.
Council returned to open session at 6:45 p.m.

Adjournment

There being no further business to address, motion to adjourn moved by Mayor Sippel, seconded by Councilmember Wareham. Motion to adjourn was unanimous. Meeting adjourned at 6:45 p.m.


Frank Sippel, Mayor


Township Clerk

Approved: *March 16, 2024*