

COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES – March 3, 2025

The meeting of the Township Council of the Township of Lower, County of Cape May, State of New Jersey was held on March 3, 2025 at 5:00 p.m. in the meeting room of the 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

Resolution # 2025-105 – Introduction of 2025 Budget

Manager Laffey presented the attached 2025 Budget Message revealing a proposed one and a half cent increase and pointing out the factors contributing to the increase. He announced the Public Hearing scheduled for April 7, 2025 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 the important factors contributing to the proposed increase. He recognized this as a sound budget and stated that the increase is minimal compared to many other municipalities.

CFO Lauren Read thanked the department heads and Manager Laffey for their collaborative efforts and stated that the proposed budget is sound and responsible. The budget will be available on the Township website tomorrow.

Mayor Sippel complimented key players for their efforts on the budget and commented on universal cost increases.

Councilmember Conrad thanked Lauren Read for her dedicated work on the budget and thanked Tax Collector Kathy Brown for an outstanding collection rate.

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

Consent Agenda

Approval of Minutes – February 19, 2025

Res. #2025-106 Authorization for the Payment of Vouchers \$ 668,044.96

Res. #2025-107 Authorization for Refund of Taxes

Res. #2025-108 Approval of Contribution to the Coast Guard Community Foundation

Res. #2025-109 Approval for Various Events Hosted by the Lower Township Recreation Department

Res. #2025-110 Resolution Supporting the City of Cape May and Cape May County's Application to the United States Coast Guard for Official Designation of Cape May County as "A Coast Guard Community"

Res. #2025-111 FY2026 Governor's Council on Substance Use Disorder

Res. #2025-112 Authorizing the Disposal of Township of Lower Surplus no longer needed for Public Use

Res. #2025-113 Authorizing the Sale of Township of Lower Surplus no longer needed for public use on GOVDEALS Online Auction Website

Res. #2025-114 Renewal of Trailer Park License for the Year 2025

Res. #2025-115 Authorization for the Payout of Accumulated Compensatory Time (J.Scheck \$16,092.74)

- Res. #2025-116 A Resolution Opposing Atlantic City Electric's 17.23% Electricity Rate Increase, Calling on Atlantic City Electric to Withdraw their Application to the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities for an Additional 8% Increase Up for Consideration in April, 2025, and calling on Members of the NJBPU to resign immediately due to their failure to uphold their Fiduciary Duty to the public as Board Members
- Res. #2025-117 Authorizing the Approval to Submit a FY2026 Community Project Funding Grant Application for the Arctic Avenue Drainage and ADA Improvement Project
- Res. #2025-118 A Resolution Authorizing the Execution of a Memorandum of Agreement between the Township of Lower and Delaware River and Bay Authority Concerning the Widening of Beach Drive between Lincoln Boulevard and the David Douglass, Sr. Memorial Park and the Construction of a Pedestrian Walkway along Beach Drive
- Res. #2025-119 Change in Custodian of Petty Cash
- Res. #2025-120 Approving Change Order #3 with DeBlasio & Associates for David Douglass Sr. Memorial Park Renovations – Permitting Phase Service (LT-C-043)

Ord #2025-08 An Ordinance Amending Chapter 500, Property Maintenance, of the Code of the Township of Lower, to Establish Regulations for Swimming Pools

Ord. #2025-09 An Ordinance Amending Chapter 475, Parks and Recreation Areas, Article IV, Fees and Reimbursements, of the Code of the Township of Lower, to enact Registration Fees Associated with a Youth Summer Camp hosted by the Lower Township Recreation Department

This is the first reading of Ordinances #08 & 09. The second reading and public hearing has been scheduled for April 7, 2025.

Mayor Sippel commented on Resolution #2025-116; opposing AC Electric's rate increases.

Mayor Sippel pointed out Ordinance #2025-09; establishing a Youth Summer Camp hosted by the Recreation Dept.

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

Regular Agenda

Ord #2025-05 An Ordinance Amending Chapter 583, Streets and Sidewalks, Article 1, Excavation of Streets, of the Code of the Township of Lower. 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				
ROY			X				
COOMBS		X	X				
SIPPEL	X		X				

Administrative Reports

Treasurer

Manager's Report

Manager Laffey gave Council an update on the Bay Outfall Extension Project as well as beach raking.

Councilmember Conrad informed that the DEP ropes off restricted areas early.

Mayor Sippel voiced concern about the areas being raked.

Public Comment

Paul Will, 704 Scott Ave, inquired about volunteering for beach clean-up.

Manager Laffey informed about Clean Communities and civic groups and suggested reaching out to the Recreation Department for more information.

Council Comments

Councilmember Conrad voiced opposition to the government's push for dependency on electricity, especially due to increases in electricity rates.

Councilmember Wareham wished good luck to the local high school basketball teams during the state tournament.

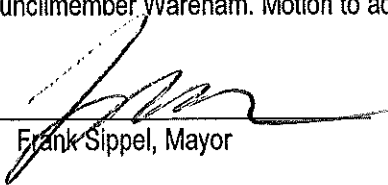
Councilmember Roy thanked the folks responsible for removing the graffiti from the Lincoln Blvd restroom facility. Councilmember Wareham informed that patrolmen were actively investigating the graffiti incident. Manager Laffey complimented the efforts of both staff and volunteers on the removal of the graffiti.

Deputy Mayor Coombs inquired about installing cameras at the Lincoln Blvd. restroom facilities. Manager Laffey informed that connectivity issues are being addressed for cameras. Councilmember Conrad suggested reaching out to Verizon for boosters. Deputy Mayor Coombs wished LCMR basketball team and wrestling team good luck in the state tournaments.

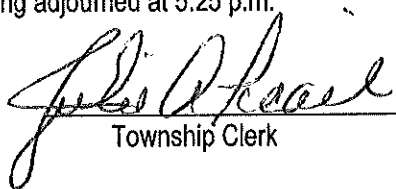
Mayor Sippel announced the Red Cross Blood Drive and Elementary Preschool Registration.

Adjournment

There being no further business to address, motion to adjourn moved by Deputy Mayor Coombs, seconded by Councilmember Wareham. Motion to adjourn was unanimous. Meeting adjourned at 5:25 p.m.



Frank Sippel, Mayor



Township Clerk

Approved: *March 17, 2025*

MANAGER'S ANNUAL BUDGET MESSAGE
2025 BUDGET INTRODUCTION – MARCH 3, 2025

Mayor and Council have received copies of the proposed municipal budget for 2025 and the local tax rate will have an increase of 1 ½ cents. We were able to cut the increase down from 2 ½ cents due to the following factors:

1. Our Tax Assessor's office worked tirelessly to increase our valuation by almost \$36M
2. We were able to anticipate greater revenues in our occupancy tax
3. We added a new revenue for local taxes on cannabis sales

The biggest spending increase in this budget is salaries and wages. We settled 4 union contracts in 2024 so this budget is the first full year with the negotiated increases. Moving forward, this spending line will be more level.

The Township completed 2024 with a surplus of \$9.4M, our second highest year-end fund balance. Of that balance \$4.5M is being applied to this year's budget. These totals fall well within the parameters of our fund balance policy and projections show that surplus will be replenished at year-end.

The tax collection rate for 2024 was 99%. This collection rate added almost \$1.4M to the surplus while all other revenues contributed almost \$2M.

One cent on this tax rate equals \$377,162 and to calculate the reserve for uncollected taxes we used 97.75%. We're below the levy cap by \$264,636 and below the spending cap by \$384,670.

The public hearing is scheduled for April 7th 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.