

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE  
MAYOR AND COUNCIL  
OF THE BOROUGH OF FRANKLIN  
HELD AT THE FRANKLIN MUNICIPAL BUILDING  
46 MAIN STREET, FRANKLIN, NJ  
MAY 12, 2026**

Mayor Sowden called the meeting to order and requested the Borough Clerk to call the roll. Upon roll call, the following members of the Governing Body were present: Mrs. Carnes, Mr. Formica, Mrs. Heath, Mr. Limon, Mr. Skellenger, Mr. Snyder and Mayor Sowden.

Absent: None

Mayor Sowden led the assembly in the flag salute.

Mayor Sowden introduced County Commission David Silverthorne

Mayor Sowden stated "This meeting is being held in compliance with the provisions of the Open Public Meetings Act, N.J.S.A. 10:4-6 et sequentes. It has been properly advertised by posting in Borough Hall and printed in the New Jersey Herald/Sunday New Jersey Herald on January 11, 2026, and posted on the Borough website, which adequate notice has been certified by the Clerk."

**PRESENTATIONS**

There were no presentations for tonight's meeting.

**COMMITTEE REPORTS**

Mrs. Heath commented that there was a personnel meeting and discussed employee manual updates, shared services renewals and possible new ones, we need to advertise for a Deputy Court Administrator or Violations Clerk and we need to advertise for a CFO starting January. Franklin Carnival is starting Wednesday and runs through Saturday. Wednesday through Friday the Carnival is open from 6pm-10pm and Saturday from 3pm-10pm. Franklin Band Concert is on May 17<sup>th</sup> and a mini parade from the Firehouse to the School and all are invited. Mrs. Williams is going to have some games and free hot dogs.

Mr. Skellenger commented that on June 9<sup>th</sup> the Motor Vehicle Mobile Unit will be coming to Franklin, appointments will open on May 18<sup>th</sup>. Services provided are real id, registration renewals, handicapped placard renewal and turn in plates.

Mr. Formica commented that we met with the engineer yesterday to go over the preliminary part of trying to go for a grant for the walking path and possible parking spots. They are starting work on High Street.

Mr. Limon had nothing to report.

Mrs. Carnes commented that there was no EDC Meeting as we are trying to figure out what direction to go. Mrs. Carnes will be reaching out to the EDC members.

Mr. Snyder commented that we are voting on the budget tonight.

Mrs. Little had nothing to report.

Mr. Spidaletto commented that on the agenda this evening is Resolution 2026-51 that was a recommendation that came out from the League of Municipalities in regards to the exorbitant health costs that continue to go up. We have been in discussions with personnel to come up with alternatives and trying to put together a meeting with Wayne Dietz our Risk Manager. Mr. Spidaletto commented that he would like to give a lot of credit to our CFO, Michelle, and Auditor for their work on the budget.

Mr. Ursin had nothing to report.

Mayor Sowden commented that the stone is at the Senior Center and the trail is cleared from Wildcat Road to Maple Road and gates are up.

## MAYOR & COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES MAY 12, 2026

### OPEN PUBLIC SESSION

Mrs. Heath made a motion to open the meeting to the public for anyone wishing to address the Governing Body. Seconded by Mr. Skellenger. All were in favor.

San Westerman stepped forward. Ms. Westerman spoke regarding the potential contamination of our aquifer, the ground water including the Wildcat Road Creek, the pond in front of her farm and the wells on Maple, Wildcat and Hemlock. On Friday, May 8<sup>th</sup>, it was the second day of unbearable noise, the first day she thought it was malfunctioning equipment coming from Princeton Packaging. Ms. Westerman walked over and asked what was with all the noise and she was told that the noise would last several more days as they were taking out the rock on the side of building because during the winter they could not get their trucks in the back due to the snow. Ms. Westermann came to the Borough and inquired about it and she was told that no permits were on file and to check with Hardyston to see if permits were on file. No permits were filed in Hardyston. This property borders the Metal Tec superfund site at 124 Wildcat Road. Ms. Westerman filed a case with NJDEP and the same has been referred it to the Board of Health.

Ms. Loretta Marra stepped forward. Ms. Marra commented that she wholehearted agrees with what San Westerman said.

Mr. Dave Silverthorne stepped forward. Mr. Silverthorne introduced himself as the new commissioner and commented that he would assist with the trail grants.

Mrs. Joanne Tatka stepped forward. Ms. Tatka commented that what she is concerned about is that property was turned over to the State, have they cleared that soil around there because they have been removing that soil and who knows where they are taking it. Has that property been cleared? Do you know the most recent results of the monitoring wells?

Mayor Sowden said that the last time he received any kind of a report was 10-15 years ago but the pollution was going to the northeast underground, quite deep but he does not know what happened now as they have filtration systems in there. The State is very particular about any kind of superfund sites. We will look into it and make sure that everything is in compliance.

Ms. Tatka commented that right where they removed all that soil and the rock is where the original owners ran the trichlorethylene and then had hoses running over the hill. Is the soil ok now?

Mayor Sowden commented that we are going to request a full report of where everything goes and how things are going there.

Ms. Tatka asked if the current owners know the history of the property.

Mr. Ursin commented that either the DEP or EPA would make the regulations on the property.

Ms. Dawne Rowe stepped forward. Ms. Rowe commented that she saw that the Carnival being set up. Ms. Rowe asked if the council has considered doing an Ordinance, in advance, of an AI Data Center.

Ms. Stacey Manning stepped forward. Ms. Manning spoke regarding support services that she could offer to the community and needs a little support. Ms. Manning commented that she brought a depression bipolar support group to the Franklin Library and they meet on Tuesday nights from 6pm-7:30pm. The library holds 18 people and they out growing the space. Ms. Manning holds a monthly wellness workshop and she is hoping to use the Senior Center, if the Council would waive the fees for the use.

There being no one else present who wished to address the Governing Body, Mr. Snyder made a motion to close the meeting to the public, seconded by Mrs. Heath. All were in favor.

**MAYOR & COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES MAY 12, 2026**

**CONSENT AGENDA**

Mayor Sowden requested that all person's present review the consent agenda and offer any comments they may have at this time regarding the consent agenda.

**CORRESPONDENCE** (ACCEPTANCE FOR FILING ONLY OF THE FOLLOWING):

1. Township of Montague resolution urging the New Jersey State Legislature and Governor to repeal the gas tax escalator and restore accountability to fuel tax increases.
2. Hampton Township Ordinance amending chapter 108, entitled "zoning" of the code of the Township of Hampton, County of Sussex, State of New Jersey to permit horses, ponies, large animals and fowl as accessory uses in certain zones subject to requirements.
3. County of Sussex Resolution establishing the percentage of one hundred percent as the ratio of assessed value to true value of real property within Sussex County.

**REPORTS** (ACCEPTANCE FOR FILING OF THE FOLLOWING):

1. County Board of Health Report – March 2026
2. Police Department Report – March 2026
3. Water/Sewer Division Report – April 2026
4. Municipal Court Report – April 2026

**APPLICATIONS** (APPROVAL OF THE FOLLOWING):

1. None

**RESOLUTIONS** (APPROVAL OF THE FOLLOWING):

1. Payment of bills for the meeting of May 12, 2026.

Mr. Limon made a motion to approve the consent agenda of May 12, 2026. Seconded by Mr. Formica.

Upon roll call vote:

Ayes: Carnes, Formica, Heath, Limon, Snyder

Nays: None Absent: None Abstentions: Skellenger

**OLD BUSINESS**

There was no old business for tonight's portion of the meeting.

**NEW BUSINESS**

**Public Hearing on the 2026 CY Municipal Budget**

Michelle LaStarza, CFO, stepped forward. Ms. LaStarza commented that we are going to adopt our total current fund budget in the amount of \$9,832,941 and the total water budget of \$3,326,903. We had a tough budget year, we had some increases in workers comp (24%), health insurance (14%) and PFRS (13%) and we are capped at 3.5%. In order to make all those necessary, we had to increase the tax rate, for the first time in a couple years, but we did not bring in the cannabis that we brought in 2025 so we didn't have the revenues. The average assessed value is going up by \$118.60. The tax rate is going from .765 to .788. The collection rate went down which caused the rate to go up.

Mayor Sowden requested a motion to open the meeting to the public for public comments on the 2026 CY Municipal Budget. Mr. Formica made a motion to open the meeting to the public for comments on the 2026 CY Budget. Seconded by Mr. Skellenger. All were in favor.

There being no one present who wished to address the Governing Body regarding the 2026CY Budget, Mr. Formica made a motion to close the meeting to the public, seconded by Mr. Skellenger. All were in favor.

**Resolution 2026-50**

Mr. Formica made a motion to adopt Resolution 2026-50 to adopt the 2026 CY Municipal Budget. Seconded by Mr. Skellenger.

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Upon roll call vote:

Ayes: Carnes, Formica, Heath, Limon, Skellenger, Snyder

Nays: None Absent: None Abstentions: None

**Approval of the Minutes**

Mrs. Carnes made a motion to approve the regular meeting minutes for April 28, 2026. (Absent: None) Seconded by Mr. Skellenger.

Upon roll call vote:

Ayes: Carnes, Formica, Heath, Limon, Skellenger, Snyder

Nays: None Absent: None Abstentions: None

**Resolution 2026-51**

Mr. Skellenger made a motion to adopt Resolution 2026-51 urging State Leaders to Implement fair and equitable reforms to mitigate the unsustainable increases in Health Benefit Premiums for Public sector employees. Seconded by Mrs. Carnes

Upon roll call vote:

Ayes: Carnes, Formica, Heath, Limon, Skellenger, Snyder

Nays: None Absent: None Abstentions: None

**Resolution 2026-52**

Mr. Skellenger made a motion to adopt Resolution 2026-52 authorizing the award of a non-fair and open contract for appointing Community Grants Planning and Housing LLC ("CGP&H") as affordable housing administrative agent at an amount not to exceed \$10,400. Seconded by Mrs. Carnes.

Upon roll call vote:

Ayes: Carnes, Formica, Heath, Limon, Skellenger, Snyder

Nays: None Absent: None Abstentions: None

**Resolution 2026-53**

Mr. Formica made a motion to adopt Resolution 2026-53 authorization to provide pond weed management. Seconded by Mr. Skellenger.

Upon roll call vote:

Ayes: Carnes, Formica, Heath, Limon, Skellenger, Snyder

Nays: None Absent: None Abstentions: None

**Resolution 2026-54**

Mrs. Heath made a motion to adopt Resolution 2026-54 authorizing the submission and execution of a grant agreement to the Sussex County Trails Grant Program in the amount of \$25,000. Seconded by Mr. Limon.

Upon roll call vote:

Ayes: Carnes, Formica, Heath, Limon, Skellenger, Snyder

Nays: None Absent: None Abstentions: None

**Resolution 2026-55**

Mrs. Heath made a motion to adopt Resolution 2026-55 authorizing the water/sewer collector to remove the overbilling on the property located at 1 Mill Street, Block 904 Lot 2 in the amount of \$9,114.00. Seconded by Mr. Formica.

Upon roll call vote:

Ayes: Carnes, Formica, Heath, Limon, Skellenger, Snyder

Nays: None Absent: None Abstentions: None

**Public Employer Trust Agreement**

Mr. Snyder made a motion to approve the Public Employer Trust Agreement between the Borough of Franklin and Brown and Brown, Benefit Advisors for Horizon Healthcare Dental for the period of July 1, 2026 to June 30, 2027, at a 5% increase in premiums, addendum with coverage cost election attached. Seconded by Mrs. Heath.

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Upon roll call vote:

Ayes: Carnes, Formica, Heath, Limon, Skellenger, Snyder

Nays: None Absent: None Abstentions: None

### Memorandum of Understanding – Habitat for Humanity

Mrs. Heath made a motion to approve the memorandum of understanding with Habitat for Humanity for the property located at 94 Main Street, Franklin. Seconded by Mr. Limon.

Upon roll call vote:

Ayes: Carnes, Formica, Heath, Limon, Skellenger, Snyder

Nays: None Absent: None Abstentions: None

### Peddler Permit Application

Mr. Limon made a motion to approve the peddler permit submitted by Juan Zerna for the sale of ice cream. Seconded by Mr. Formica.

Upon roll call vote:

Ayes: Carnes, Formica, Heath, Limon, Snyder

Nays: None Absent: None Abstentions: Skellenger

### American Legion Post 132 request

Mr. Snyder made a motion to approve the request from the American Legion Post 132 to hold their Memorial Day Parade on May 25, 2026; parade line up will start at the Legion Post at 10:15am, parade starts at 10:30am. Seconded by Mrs. Heath

Upon roll call vote:

Ayes: Carnes, Formica, Heath, Limon, Skellenger, Snyder

Nays: None Absent: None Abstentions: None

### Approval of NJ State Firemen's Association Membership Application

Mr. Skellenger made a motion to approve the application for membership of Christopher Hakkenberg as Firematic member to the Franklin Fire Department as endorsed by Corey Houghtaling, Franklin Fire Department Chief. Seconded by Mrs. Heath.

Upon roll call vote:

Ayes: Carnes, Formica, Heath, Skellenger, Snyder

Nays: None Absent: None Abstentions: Limon

### Application for use of the Senior Center

Mr. Formica made a motion to approve the application from Stacey Manning for Action Wellness Link on May 20, June 17 and July 21, 2026 to conduct workshops for arts and crafts and to waive the fees associated with the rental. Seconded by Mrs. Heath.

Upon roll call vote:

Ayes: Carnes, Formica, Heath, Limon, Skellenger, Snyder

Nays: None Absent: None Abstentions: None

### America's 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Proclamation

Mr. Skellenger made a motion to adopt the proclamation commemorating the 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the United States of America. Seconded by Mr. Formica.

Upon roll call vote:

Ayes: Carnes, Formica, Heath, Limon, Skellenger, Snyder

Nays: None Absent: None Abstentions: None

## **EXECUTIVE SESSION**

In accordance with the provisions of the Open Public Meetings Act, Mr. Limon made a motion to adjourn into closed executive session to discuss personnel and attorney client privilege matters. Motion seconded by Mrs. Heath.

Upon roll call vote:

Ayes: Carnes, Formica, Heath, Limon, Skellenger

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Nays: None Absent: None Abstentions: Snyder

After meeting in closed session, the Governing Body returned to their seats at 8:17p.m. and Mayor Sowden declared the meeting to be reconvened into open public session.

Mr. Skellenger made a motion to return from executive session. Seconded by Mrs. Carnes All were in favor.

**MISCELLANEOUS COMMENTS**

There were no miscellaneous comments.

**ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further items for discussion by the Mayor and Council, Mr. Skellenger made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:17p.m., seconded by Mrs. Carnes. All were in favor.

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John M. Sowden IV, Mayor

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Colleen L. Little, Municipal Clerk