

Minutes of the Re-Organization Meeting of the Borough Council held January 4th 2024, at 7:00 P.M. in the Council Chambers, Borough Hall, 531 Speedwell Avenue, Morris Plains, New Jersey.

Mayor Karr called the meeting to order.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE, PRAYER AND MOMENT OF SILENCE

Mayor Karr asked everyone to join in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Notice to members of the Governing Body and Borough Staff: Any use of electronic devices during this meeting shall be used solely for the purposes of Borough business.

National Anthem was sung by the Borough School Students Hannah Clark, Caroline Higgins and Hannah Singh.

Mayor Karr opened with a moment of silence for all who were lost in 2023.

He welcomed Father Dailon, Saint Margaret’s Church, who presented the invocation.

Mayor Karr called the meeting to order and read the following notice:

“I HEREBY ANNOUNCE AND STATE THAT ADEQUATE NOTICE OF THIS MEETING WAS PROVIDED BY VIRTUE OF A RESOLUTION SCHEDULING THE TIME, DATE AND PLACE OF MEETINGS OF THE BOROUGH COUNCIL OF THE BOROUGH OF MORRIS PLAINS FOR THE YEAR 2023; WHICH RESOLUTION WAS ADOPTED BY THE BOROUGH COUNCIL ON JANUARY 5th 2023, AND PUBLISHED IN THE MORRIS NEWS BEE AND THE DAILY RECORD; AND BY POSTING OF SUCH RESOLUTION ON THE BULLETIN BOARD IN THE BOROUGH HALL; ALL OF THE ABOVE ACTIONS BEING IN ACCORDANCE WITH N.J.S.A. 10:4-6 et seq.”

Mayor Karr recognized the many Officials, past and present, in attendance and offered thanks.

STATEMENT OF DETERMINATION OF MUNICIPAL ELECTION

Rosanne Denman, Borough Clerk, read the following statement:

“A Statement of Determination of the Board of County Canvassers, relative to an election held in the Borough of Morris Plains in the County of Morris and State of New Jersey, for the election of certain municipal officers for the municipality on the 7th day of November, 2023.

The said Board does determine that at the said election:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Office</u>	<u>Term</u>
Sal Cortese	Borough Council	Three-Year Term
Art Bruhn	Borough Council	Three-Year Term

Were duly elected to the office and for the term above set forth. I do hereby certify that the foregoing is a truthful and correct statement of the determination of the Board of Canvassers therein mentioned and witnessed whereof I have hereunto set my hand this 20th day of November 2023.

INTRODUCTION AND OATH OF OFFICE OF COUNCILMEMBERS-ELECT

Mayor Karr invited Councilmember-Elect Sal Cortese to be sworn in. His wife, Lisa, held the bible as Mr. Cortese was sworn in.

Mayor Karr next invited Councilmember-Elect Art Bruhn to be sworn in. His girlfriend, Kim Newport, held the bible as Mr. Bruhn was sworn in.

Present on Roll Call:

Mayor Jason C Karr
Councilmembers: Dennis Wagner
Art Bruhn
Salvatore Cortese
Cathie Kelly
Joan Goddard
Nancy Verga

Absent: None

Present: John E. Horan, Borough Attorney
Leon Hall, Borough Engineer

ADDRESS BY MAYOR JASON C. KARR

Good evening and welcome to our Reorganization Meeting. Tonight, I aim to highlight our 2023 achievements and shed light on our goals for 2024.

Over the past two years, our Borough has allocated \$655,000 from the American Rescue Plans local fiscal recovery fund. Many upgrades, including renovations to our Municipal Building, Borough Annex, computer systems, COVID-related expenses and a grant writer’s salary, are completed. Two remaining projects are the playground at Simons Park and refurbishing and painting the Fire Department’s Engine 3, extending its life by about ten years. Any remaining funds will be strategically used, adhering to the Grant’s limitations.

In 2023, infrastructure improvements continued with paving 8 Borough roads, introducing a new crosswalk, signage, a section of sidewalk at Franklin and Mountain Way, and enhancing the Freight station walkway and stairs. Although repaving of Glenbrook Road was initially planned for 2023 funded by DOT grant awarded in the amount of \$250,000, this project has been postponed until late 2025 due to water main and service line replacements from early 2024 onwards. Additionally, Community Park's playground is set for a grant funded \$65,000 upgrade, expected to be completed by the upcoming Spring season.

For 2024, we are determined to persist with infrastructure enhancements, planning to pave eight more roads. A \$208,000 grant for repaving Stiles Avenue awaits commencement which will begin after the installation of new water main and service lines. Details of approved roads and projects will soon be available on the Borough's website, Plains Talk and email alerts.

Several significant developments are underway, including the completion of "The American" project on American Road with the issuance of the final Certificates of Occupancy coming this Spring and the apartments at this project are complete and fully occupied. The residential development on the west side of Route 53 has made progress in 2023 with the issuance of Certificates of Occupancy with the near completion of the market rate units along with the stand alone affordable housing building which is seeing occupancies. Moving forward, we look forward to the construction of the remaining rental units. At this time, the development at the previous Johnson & Johnson site, has a signed site plan for warehouse as well as office space. Site work will be commencing shortly. Efforts to attract interest in the former Acme, Friendly's and Collins properties continue.

Our business friendly Community of Caring would like to welcome our new businesses; B & E Furniture, Autodidact Brewery, Home Towne Pet Shoppe, Sangeetha Indian Restaurant and City MD. We continue to see small businesses move into our downtown area.

The Planning Board and Council have worked diligently for over two years and finally passed Ordinance Number 14-2023, which revised and modernized permitted uses in all non-residential zones in the Borough. It updates, refines and modernizes existing uses and definitions in the current Ordinance. It also added over one hundred (100) new uses. This will help the Borough and businesses, moving forward, and is one of the largest upgrades to our zoning in over twenty (20) years which was collaboratively worked on by The Planning Board, The Master Plan Committee, Borough Council and Borough professionals. The Borough received grant funding for sidewalks and walking paths along route 53 near Foxwood and our recycling center, connecting residents to the Route 10 corridor. This project has now received DOT approval and permits.

In early 2023, the Council and I were able to recognize the Police Department as they received their 5th Certificate of Accreditation as a Law Enforcement Agency. This makes our police department part of an elite group of a mere 3.6% of agencies in the State of NJ to attain such status. This is a significant professional achievement. Please join me in congratulating our Chief, the Department and all who worked on achieving this milestone. One significant addition during the past year was the addition of license plate readers and cameras strategically located within the Borough. This was an effort in conjunction with the Morris County Sheriff's Office, The State of New Jersey, New Jersey State Police enabling our police department and others to solve crimes, deter auto thefts and keep residents safe. The Borough acquired Idlewild Pool this past fall and the hope is to open the pool this season for a summer of fun and memories as previously made at the pool. The Borough has also entered into a contract at 1 Jim Fear Drive which includes the wooded area adjacent to the Community Center. A closing is anticipated shortly.

During 2023, the Borough celebrated the retirement of the following: Volunteers Ellie Falco from Clean Communities, Jim Rogers and John Verga from The Planning Board, Jim Davidson from The Shade Tree, Meghan Houston from Recreation Commission, George Ross from the Community Garden, Suzanne McCluskey as Manager of the Farmer's Market. Employees: Sherwood "Woody" Stevens, Tom Silk from our DPW, Lindsay Fu Editor of Plains Talk, Ed Easse from our Building Department, Lt. Michael E. Rolph and Deann Carroll from our Police Department and finally, our Professional Engineer, Leon Hall who has been the Borough's Engineer for twenty plus years.

The Borough also recognized 25 years of service for the following employees: Ana Thomas, Finance Department, Sigal Rice and Detective Sergeant Bruce Rapp from our Police Department, Kevin Rongo from our DPW. We thank them for their countless hours, ideas, commitment and passion for our Community.

Our Farmer's Market tradition continued with the Farmer's Market again this year and moving forward with our new Market Manager Mike Cocheo along with the Business Development Committee and Council. The Market saw upgrades this season, many new vendors and events. It continued with the now "annual" tradition of its second Winter's Market which featured craft vendors, food vendors and holiday décor and items fitting for the season.

Pickleball Courts have been completed at Watnong Park with funds set aside for park upgrades. This spring, a fence will be installed around the courts to complete the project.

In 2023, DOWNTOWN MORRIS PLAINS was launched as a Nonprofit organization established following the 2020 formation of the Borough's Business Development Committee. Their mission is to continue the economic, social and cultural enrichment in our local business district. Downtown Morris Plains aims to initiate and fund projects such as their first event, the Pumpkin Illumination that benefits all of our businesses and residents and attract interest from beyond the Borough of Morris Plains.

On September 30th, it was an honor to recognize Bergelt Opticians as they celebrated 50 years in business in Morris Plains. Mike, his wife, Cindy and his mother, Effi were visited by many Community members to help celebrate this golden accomplishment. December 17, 2023 was declared "Morris Plains Rotary Day" in celebration of the 50th Anniversary of this dedicated volunteer organization. We appreciate the dedication and contributions to the Borough over the last half century!

The Borough will be celebrating its 100th birthday in 2026. To celebrate this birthday, I will be selecting members to form a committee to plan and coordinate a celebration for the community to mark this milestone.

A fun thing happened this year – in October, Lauren Due of News12 highlighted Morris Plains on their “Main Street” segment which showcased 7 of our local businesses. It was great to see the excitement of our business owners describe why they chose Morris Plains to be their home. If you missed the segment, you can find it on the News12 website under “Main Street”.

Our Borough is unique upheld by committed volunteers who sustain the vibrancy of our "Community of Caring." There's a role for everyone in our diverse array of opportunities: from playing in the Community Band, open to all ages, to joining the Morris Plains Volunteer Fire Department at 14 or the Morris Minute Men First Aid Squad at 16. History buffs can contribute at our Museum, while nature enthusiasts can engage with the Garden Club, Beautification Committee, and Clean Communities Program. For sports enthusiasts and scouts, there are numerous groups to participate in. Volunteers of all ages are welcomed and appreciated for their outstanding contributions, each playing a vital role that our residents truly value. On behalf of the Borough Council, I want to thank all of the many volunteers on boards, commissions, committees and all citizens for your commitment to our town. This is what makes it truly special and helps to continue moving Morris Plains forward.

At this time on behalf of the Borough Council and myself, I would like to sincerely thank every one of our dedicated, hardworking employees for everything they contributed throughout the year. Their hard work and dedication to the Borough is met with a heartfelt thank you. To our Police and Fire Departments, thank you for everything everyone has done to keep every resident safe and protected 24 hours a day all year. The Fire Department received 6 new volunteer members and 4 junior members. To the respective Chiefs, thank you for keeping your departments safe and guiding your members through this past year with all the challenges thrown at you in a professional way, without skipping a beat or missing any call for service. To the DPW, John Signorelli and Leo Mulligan, residents never saw a day missed with your department. Work has been performed without hesitation and you and your department have continued to make our town look terrific. Grass was cut, spectacular decorations put up, leaves picked up and roads cleared of snow. Nothing stopped in Morris Plains and it has never looked better. As to all our essential workers, health care workers and first responders, everyone goes above and beyond and continues to do so every day. Each and every one does their best to keep us all safe and healthy!

I encourage everyone to sign up for the Morris Plains Email Alert and Smart911. Links may be found on the Borough’s website. This will enable you to keep up with the happenings of Morris Plains and will assist First Responders in the event of an emergency.

In closing, I am excited to have shared with you the current status of Morris Plains and some of our achievements. The Boroughs’ year ahead looks bright in welcoming new commercial, residential and businesses to our community. These accomplishments are direct results of dedicated individuals and knowledgeable planning for both short and long term. We've inherited an incredible foundation to build upon. Let's persist in our progress and keep moving forward. The Council and I will continue to work hard this year and years to come to keep Morris Plains moving forward and remain the “Community of Caring” that we all know, respect and love. We are always available and always welcome your thoughts. My plan for the Borough is to once again fully fund our capital projects so as not to accrue future debt and pay down current debt further. Open space will continue to be on our radar, as open space is important to all of our residents. Uses of open space will always be important and taken into consideration when making these decisions. We have funded our Fire Department as mentioned earlier, and also equipped them with new radios, turnout gear, and breathing apparatus - again to keep everyone safe. We have accomplished this and so much more while remaining within our 2% State mandated cap.

In 2024, the Borough will be faced with substantial increases in healthcare cost in the amount of 8%, increases in pension, nearly \$34,000 increase in disposal and transportation costs for garbage and \$27,000 increase in recycling. These increases will be addressed in our upcoming budget and it is our goal to have a little impact as possible to the taxpayers while continually preparing us for the future. Continuing our exploration of shared services across all departments and positions, in collaboration with local, County, and State agencies, will play a pivotal role in maintaining Morris Plains' fiscal responsibility.

For the second consecutive year, the Borough’s ratable base increased; however, we strive to match our highest ratable base of 2009 and the continued increase in ratables is certainly encouraging. With the increasing ratables, sound planning and good governing, the Borough stands to be financially stable but will certainly have to weather storms moving forward.

I would like to leave you with a quote by Eleanor Roosevelt “It isn’t enough to talk about peace. One must believe in it. And it isn’t enough to believe in it. One must work at it.”
Have a Happy, peaceful and Healthy New Year, God Bless You, Morris Plains and God Bless America.

Mayor Jason C. Karr

ELECTION OF PRESIDENT OF BOROUGH COUNCIL FOR THE YEAR 2024

Councilmember Wagner placed in nomination the name of Councilmember Verga as Council President for the year 2024.

Seconded by Councilmember Cortese.

There were no further nominations and the Mayor closed the nominations asking for a vote.

Yeas: Councilmembers Wagner, Bruhn, Cortese, Goddard, Kelly
Nays: None
Absent: None

Abstain: Councilmember Verga

Mayor Karr congratulated Council President Verga.

APPOINTMENTS BY THE MAYOR

Mayor Karr appointed the following persons to the office stated and the term specified:

PLANNING BOARD		
Frank J. Druetzler	Class II	1 year
Michael Garavaglia	Class IV	4 years
Marianne Steckert	Class IV	4 years

BOARD OF ADJUSTMENT		
Michael Bozza, Vice Chair		4 years
Bart Cianciotta Alternate II		2 years
Mark Karr		4 years

RECREATION COMMISSION		
Kevin Bodnar, Vice Chair		5 years
Gerard Sittmann, Chair		5 years
Kelly Kulick		4 years
To fill the unexpired term of Meghan Houston which expires 12/31/27		

SHADE TREE		
Michael Lombardi		5 years

ROBERTS GARDENS		
Sandra Bailey		3 years

BOARD OF HEALTH		
Colin O'Reilly, DO, FAAP, FACOP, FCCM, President		3 years
Lauren Pallone Martin, MD FAAP		3 years

HUMANE LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICER (HLEO)		
Sgt. Jeffrey Hochman		1 year
Sgt. Michael Kelly		1 year

ADOPTION OF RESOLUTIONS

Councilmember Verga moved that Resolutions 2024-1 through 2024-29 be adopted.

No. 2024-1	By-Laws
No. 2024-2	Planning Board Representative
No. 2024-3	Standing Committees
No. 2024-4	Appointments
No. 2024-5	Notice of Meetings
No. 2024-6	Adequate Notice of Meetings
No. 2024-7	Request for Notice of Meetings
No. 2024-8	Minutes of Meetings
No. 2024-9	Conference Meetings
No. 2024-10	Depositories for Borough Funds
No. 2024-11	Authorizing Officers to Sign Approved Checks
No. 2024-12	Delinquent Taxes and Tax Installments
No. 2024-13	Professional Services
No. 2024-14	Execution of Vouchers
No. 2024-15	Designating Official Newspaper
No. 2024-16	Fixing Holidays - Borough Employees
No. 2024-17	Fixing Holidays - Police Officers
No. 2024-18	Council Appointments
No. 2024-19	Temporary Appropriations for Operating Purposes
No. 2024-20	Waiving Interest on Delinquent Taxes for Senior Citizens
No. 2024-21	Waiving Interest on Delinquent Taxes for Disabled Persons
No. 2024-22	Authorizing Tax Collector to Process Property Tax in Amount Less Than \$10.00
No. 2024-23	Authorizing Borough Clerk to execute Hold Harmless Agreements
No. 2024-24	Time Capsule - Morris Plains Library
No. 2024-25	Time Capsule – Community Park
No. 2024-26	Civil Rights Policy
No. 2024-27	Enforcement Guidance Under Civil Rights
No. 2024-28	Reappointing Member to SMCMUA
No. 2024-29	Reappointing Emergency Management Coordinator

Seconded by Councilmember Kelly

Yeas: Councilmembers Verga, Bruhn, Cortese, Goddard, Kelly, Wagner
Nays: None
Absent: None
Abstain: None

PRESENTATION OF BADGES TO FIRE DEPARTMENT OFFICERS

Mayor Karr presented badges to the following Officers of the Department for the year 2024:

Chief Kevin Rongo

Chief 1	Bob Webster
Chief 2	Mark Belles
Engineer	Donald Underhill
Assistant Engineer	Tyler Shay
Fire Prevention Chief	Chris Shay

Mayor Karr congratulated all the officers of the Fire Department.

PRESENTATION OF AWARDS

Mayor Karr presented the Annual Community Service award. This award is given to an individual or group “WHO HAVE MADE A NOTABLE CONTRIBUTION OVER A SUBSTANTIAL PERIOD OF TIME FOR THE BETTERMENT OF THE COMMUNITY OF CARING.” He presented the award to Gary and Marcia Windt who will also be the Grand Marshals of the 2024 Memorial Day Parade.

The Windt’s daughter, Katie, accepted the award for her parents who are out of town this evening.

ADMINISTRATION OF OATH OF OFFICE TO APPOINTEES

Mayor Karr asked all who have been elected or appointed to office to stand, state their names and repeat the Mayor’s words for the oath. He asked all those who took the oaths of office to sign the appropriate forms.

MEETING OPEN FOR REMARKS AND COMMENTS BY CITIZENS

Mayor Karr opened the meeting to the public.

Penny Jones spoke about recycling in the Borough of Morris Plains.

ADJOURNMENT

Councilmember Bruhn moved the Reorganization Meeting be adjourned at organization 7:53 P.M.

Seconded by Councilmember Cortese.

Voice Vote. All in favor.

Jason C. Karr, Mayor

Rosanne Denman, Borough Clerk