

Minutes of the Re-Organization Meeting of the Borough Council held January 7th 2025, 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 Student Caroline Higgins.

Mayor Karr opened with a moment of silence for Pearl Law and all who were lost in 2024.

Mayor Karr welcomed Rabbi Boruch Benjaminson, Chabad Torah Center, 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 2024; WHICH RESOLUTION WAS ADOPTED BY THE BOROUGH COUNCIL ON JANUARY 4th 2024, 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 5th day of November, 2024.

The said Board does determine that at the said election:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Office</u>	<u>Term</u>
William “Bill” Houston	Borough Council	Three-Year Term
Tyler Pontier	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 18th day of November 2024.

INTRODUCTION AND OATH OF OFFICE OF COUNCILMEMBERS-ELECT

Mayor Karr invited Councilmember-Elect Bill Houston to be sworn in. His wife, Meghan, held the bible as Mr. Houston was sworn in. (Family members present; wife, Meghan, son Liam and daughter Emily and in-laws.)

Mayor Karr next invited Councilmember-Elect Tyler Pontier to be sworn in. His wife, Meredith held the bible as Mr. Pontier was sworn in. (Family members present; wife, Meredith, daughters Teegan and Mariah, parents, brother and mentors)

Present on Roll Call:

- Mayor Jason C Karr
- Councilmembers: Nancy Verga
Art Bruhn
Salvatore Cortese
Joan Goddard
Bill Houston
Tyler Pontier

Absent: None

Present: John E. Horan, Borough Attorney
William Ryden, Borough Engineer

ADDRESS BY MAYOR JASON C. KARR

Good evening and welcome to our annual Reorganizational Meeting.

My goal is to highlight some of the 2024 accomplishments and lay out some of the goals for an exciting 2025. Before I begin, I would like to take a moment to congratulate Councilman Bill Houston and Councilman Tyler Pontier on their triumphant quest and are joining us here to do their part in making Morris Plains the best it can be! Welcome and best of luck to you both during the next 3 years of your term. I am confident you both will excel as you grow in your new roles. To Cathy and Dennis, your dedication and commitment over your past two terms has been nothing short of honorable. You both know what it takes to be great Councilmembers and I know you exceeded those expectations. Your input, ideas, dialogue and your true compassion for Morris Plains was evident in every decision you both made and you should be proud of each and every accomplishment that you contributed to. Once again, thank you for your commitment to Morris Plains and making it a better place than when you started. Good luck on your next chapters!

Infrastructure is always a top priority and in 2024 we accomplished a tremendous amount of upgrades including water main and service line replacement of nearly 100-year-old pipes on Glenbrook Rd., Bangiola Court and Keenan Pl. Additionally, the paving of eight roads in 2024 were completed during the summer months. Glenbrook Road, in its entirety, will be repaved from curb to curb by the third quarter of 2025. Also on the queue to be paved this year are Beech Drive, Brook Dr. North, Cleveland Ave., Davenport Rd., Forest Ave., Forest Ct., Sun Valley Way, and Wynwood Rd. Water main and service line replacement will continue on Stiles Ave., Central Ave., Carlyle Ave., Homer Ave., Hawthorne Ave., the west side of Maple Ave., Diana Rd., and Burch Dr., which, in fact, has begun this past December. These roads will subsequently be paved in 2026.

Included in upgrades in 2024 was the completion of the two new pickleball courts and perimeter fencing at Watnong Park. Along with the courts at Watnong a grant was received for the purchase of new playground equipment which is currently on order and pending its arrival. Simons Park also had an upgrade, with an enhancement to the playground equipment, which has made a phenomenal difference since its reopening following construction. As I remain on the topic of playgrounds, I am happy to say that the equipment has also been added to and upgraded at Community Park as well. The Borough proudly received a grant to complete this project.

One of the most important decisions the Council made in 2024 was purchasing the property located at 1 Jim Fear Dr., which includes a residential structure and nearly 3 acres of property which was put on the market. The purpose of this purchase is to preserve the natural beauty and wildlife of this great park area. As for an update for the Idlewild pool, after reports from our insurance carrier, Borough Engineer, and his assessment along with others, the cost to bring the pool to Municipal standards is just too costly to justify, nearly 3 million dollars. The decision has been made to explore options for the space while keeping it recreational and open to all residents of Morris Plains. With the receipt of two trail grants, one for a sidewalk along Rt. 53 near Davenport Village and Foxwood has been designed and received DOT funding and permits. The project will go to bid for construction to begin in the Spring. The 2nd is for the permitting and design of walking trails around Community Park, along with the implementation grant to be applied for.

In the area of public safety, the Borough took on a number of initiatives including the refurbishing of the fire department's Engine 3 which should extend the life of this apparatus by at least 10 years. The purchase of a new mini pumper for the fire department was also made this year and we are expecting delivery of this vehicle by the end of 2025 or early 2026. The FD has put together a committee to explore the possibility of replacing Engine 4, a 25-year-old pumper in the fleet in the upcoming years. The Council also voted to make our part-time Fire Prevention Chief position now full time and has worked out well for the Borough to date. We also repurposed and outfitted a vehicle from the police department for the use by fire department chiefs. The old fire whistle that was damaged beyond repair in a storm in February is going to be replaced and mounted on the roof of the fire house. This project should be complete for our upcoming Memorial Day parade. Discussions are being held on the possibility of sounding the whistle at 5 o'clock again and for a major incident that may occur in town. Progress has also been made in our police department. We saw the promotion of Robert Guild to Lieutenant and Joseph Heinz to the role of Sergeant. Congratulations to both of you and best of luck moving forward. The process has begun by the police Chief and a committee in regards to exploring the possibility of an expansion, addition or renovation of the police department and other areas of Town Hall. Last week the police department took delivery of another hybrid patrol vehicle which helps lower our carbon footprint and will further lower our gas consumption seeing significant savings. With this addition, the Borough now has 3 hybrids in the fleet. In 2025, I think the Council should consider the hiring of a police officer due to continued demands and increase of traffic violations, volume and calls for service.

Our road department is also seeing the upgrade of older vehicles and equipment throughout this past year. The retirement of Leo Mulligan as Assistant Superintendent from the DPW in 2024 after 33 years was truly a loss. Let's take a moment to thank Leo for his dedication, leadership and knowledge of every inch of Morris Plains. Even though we lost a fantastic

employee, Leo's position was filled right away by the promotion of Kevin Rongo, who has stepped right up to the task and demands of this position and hasn't skipped a beat. Thank you, Congratulations Kevin and best of luck moving forward.

There were certainly some highlights in 2024 that are worth mentioning. Two of which are milestones, the Morris Plains Rotary celebrated its 50th anniversary of being established in Morris Plains. Ironically the clock they donated to Morris Plains stopped working and just last month was replaced recognizing their 50th anniversary. A huge thank you goes out to the entire club for ALL you do in and for Morris Plains and its residents. You are an integral part of the Community and we look forward to the next 50 years. Another milestone is the 150th anniversary of the Presbyterian Church of Morris Plains on Speedwell Ave. They have been in existence longer than the town itself. Again, a big congratulation on your milestone and thank you for being such a committed partner in so many activities and events and I know that will continue for the next 150 years.

A few more activities worth noting was the second annual pumpkin illumination, which was planned and sponsored by the Downtown Morris Plains Committee. This was a huge success that surpassed all expectations again. This looks to be an annual, ever-growing event that everyone can look forward to with new additions and fun for years to come. Thank you to the entire committee along with all the volunteers, participants, and businesses that make this event successful. The Farmers and Winter Markets have continued to improve each year, continuing as a staple in town that residents and guests look forward to. Each year promises not to disappoint. Thanks to everyone on the Council and others who make this happen each week and to all those who patronize the vendors. It takes everyone to make this the success that it is. The last event I would like to mention is the Mental Health Symposium that was held in September. This was the 4th one in the County that brings together experts in addiction, law enforcement, and mental health crises. Personal anecdotes and resources are available for anyone in need of services, advice, resources or just knowledge. The symposium was recorded and will be placed on our website along with links for different areas of help and information. This will be available very shortly and will be advertised when available.

In 2024 the business climate in Morris Plains remains strong. The businesses that opened this past year include Cho's Legacy and Martial Arts, Be Creative, Hot Tub Central and a new location for Bliss Hair Studio. This year, there are several anticipated businesses to open and we look forward to welcoming them to the Borough.

A committee had been assembled early in 2024 for the planning of the Boroughs' 100th anniversary celebration, which will be upon us very soon in 2026. They have been diligently meeting and discussing many ideas and fun events that will take place all year. Looking forward to this celebration and all the activities being planned. Another committee that has been working very hard this past year is the Affordable Housing Committee. As I have reported previously this past year, our affordable obligation given to Morris Plains is 137 units. This number doesn't seem too bad except that a developer is able to build 5 market rate units for each affordable unit which equates here to 685 units. This number is a little more than what was just built in Morris Plains from the last round on American Rd. and Rt.53.

The Council and I are not opposed to affordable housing, however we acknowledge that it is the density that will be an issue here in Morris Plains along with the impact to our infrastructure, resources such as water, safety, traffic and schools. Where will all this housing go? Wooded areas, vacant or unutilized lots or our recycle center? These are some of the issues this committee along with our professionals and affordable housing attorney are working on. Towards the end of this month, I will schedule a town hall meeting to give a further, much more in depth update as to our obligation, our path and plan moving forward.

Our Borough is uniquely 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 and myself, 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. We 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 3 new volunteer members and 1 junior member. 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. Our Police Department has partnered with the Morris County Prosecutor's Office and Mental Health Association of Morris and Essex to participate in the ARRIVE program. This program partners law enforcement officers with a mental health professional to respond to mental health calls providing de-escalation assistance, assessment and motivational

interviewing. Our DPW, John Signorelli and Leo Mulligan and now Kevin Rongo, 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. The grass was cut, spectacular decorations put up, leaves picked up and roads cleared of snow. Morris Plains has never looked better.

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.

Financially, for the third consecutive year, the Borough’s rateables have appreciated. I am happy to announce that we have officially exceeded our previous record high in 2009 by nearly two-million dollars. Our current rateable base of 2024 is \$1,488,353,500.00. With the increasing rateables, sound planning and good governing, the Borough stands to be financially stable but will certainly have to navigate unforeseen challenges moving forward.

In 2025, the Borough will be faced with substantial, yet unavoidable increases in healthcare cost in the amount of 17%, increases in pension, an increase in disposal tipping fees for garbage and 2% increase in recycling. These increases will be addressed in our upcoming budget and it is our goal to have as 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.

My plan for the Borough is to once again 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 accomplished this and so much more while remaining within our 2% State mandated cap and actually this year most residents saw a decrease in their tax bill.

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. Let's persist in our progress and keep moving forward. The Council and I will continue to work hard this year and the 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.

I would like to leave you with a quote by Rainer Maria Rilke, “And now, we welcome the new year. Full of things that have never been.”

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 Verga placed in nomination the name of Councilmember Cortese as Council President for the year 2025.

Seconded by Councilmember Bruhn.

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

Yeas: Councilmembers Verga, Bruhn, Goddard, Houston, Pontier
Nays: None
Absent: None
Abstain: Councilmember Cortese

Mayor Karr congratulated Council President Cortese.

APPOINTMENTS BY THE MAYOR
Mayor Karr appointed the following persons to the office stated and the term specified:

PLANNING BOARD		
Steve Augenblick	Class IV	4 years
Andrew Wolff	Class II	1 year
Bill Houston	Class III	1 year
BOARD OF ADJUSTMENT		
Doug McCabe	Vice Chair	4 years
Dan Rizos	Alternate I	2 years
RECREATION COMMISSION		
Mandy Markt		5 years

SHADE TREE		
Frank Druetzler		5 years
ROBERTS GARDENS		
Nancy Critchley		3 years
BOARD OF HEALTH		
Angie Mckinlay		3 years
HUMANE LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICER (HLEO)		
Sgt. Jeffrey Hochman		1 year
Sgt. Michael Kelly		1 year
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT		
Robert Martin Representative		1 year
Michael Bozza Alternate		1 year

ADOPTION OF RESOLUTIONS

Councilmember Verga asked for Resolution 2025-3 and 2025-4 be held for approval. Seconded by Councilmember Houston.

Yeas: Councilmembers Cortese, Bruhn, Goddard, Houston, Pontier, Verga
Nays: None
Absent: None
Abstain: None

Councilmember Cortese moved that Resolutions 2025-1 and 2025-2 and 2025-5 through 2025-28 be adopted.

No. 2025-1	By-Laws
No. 2025-2	Planning Board Representative
No. 2025-5	Notice of Meetings
No. 2025-6	Adequate Notice of Meetings
No. 2025-7	Request for Notice of Meetings
No. 2025-8	Minutes of Meetings
No. 2025-9	Conference Meetings
No. 2025-10	Depositories for Borough Funds
No. 2025-11	Authorizing Officers to Sign Approved Checks
No. 2025-12	Delinquent Taxes and Tax Installments
No. 2025-13	Professional Services
No. 2025-14	Execution of Vouchers
No. 2025-15	Designating Official Newspaper
No. 2025-16	Fixing Holidays - Borough Employees
No. 2025-17	Fixing Holidays - Police Officers
No. 2025-18	Council Appointments
No. 2025-19	Temporary Appropriations for Operating Purposes
No. 2025-20	Waiving Interest on Delinquent Taxes for Senior Citizens
No. 2025-21	Waiving Interest on Delinquent Taxes for Disabled Persons
No. 2025-22	Authorizing Tax Collector to Process Property Tax in Amount Less Than \$10.00
No. 2025-23	Authorizing Borough Clerk to execute Hold Harmless Agreements
No. 2025-24	Time Capsule - Morris Plains Library
No. 2025-25	Time Capsule – Community Park
No. 2025-26	Civil Rights Policy
No. 2025-27	Enforcement Guidance Under Civil Rights
No. 2025-28	Resolution Appointing Community Development Revenue Sharing Committee Representative

Seconded by Councilmember Goddard.

Yeas: Councilmembers Verga, Bruhn, Cortese, Goddard, Houston, Pontier,
Nays: None
Absent: None
Abstain: None

Councilmember Verga moved Resolution 2025-3 and 2025-4 be adopted as rewritten. Seconded by Councilmember Houston.

No. 2025-3	Standing Committees
No. 2025-4	Appointments

Yeas: Councilmembers Cortese, Bruhn, Goddard, Houston, Pontier, Verga

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 2025:

Chief	Kevin Rongo
Chief 1	Bob Webster
Chief 2	Mark Belles
Engineer	David Kitchell
Assistant Engineer	Tyler Shay
Fire Prevention Chief	Chris Shay

Mayor Karr congratulated all the officers of the Fire Department.

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.

Steve Welsh thanked the Borough for replacing the Rotary Clock.

Dennis Wagner, thanked everyone for all of their support during his 2 terms as a Councilmember.

Kamil Waronovich, 3 Crestview Court West, thanked everyone for their great work and stated he reached out to NJDOT regarding a traffic meeting and they do not have a record of a conversation between McDonald’s and NJDOT.

Councilmember Goddard read a statement regarding her resignation from Borough Council and thanked everyone for their support of her and her family.

PRESENTATION OF AWARDS

Mayor Karr presented Cathie Kelly and Dennis Wagner with a retirement rocking chairs for their time served on the Council.

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.” The award was presented this year to the Presbyterian Church of Morris Plains.

Reverend Don Brown accepted the award on behalf of the congregation and elders of the church.

BENEDICTION

Reverend Don Brown, Presbyterian Church of Morris Plains gave the benediction.

ADJOURNMENT

Councilmember Bruhn moved the Reorganization Meeting be adjourned at organization 8:26 P.M.

Seconded by Councilmember Cortese.

Voice Vote. All in favor.

Jason C. Karr, Mayor

Rosanne Denman, Borough Clerk