

TOWNSHIP OF HILLSIDE
SPECIAL MEETING OF THE TOWNSHIP COUNCIL
MINUTES

July 8, 2025 @ 1:05pm *Agenda subject to change*

The Special Meeting of the Township of Hillside Township Council was held on July 8, 2025 on Zoom at 12:00pm.

CALL TO ORDER

Craig Epps, Council President called the meeting to order.

STATEMENT OF PUBLIC NOTICE

Rayna E. Harris, Township Clerk read the following statement: This Meeting was called pursuant to the provisions of the Open Public Meetings Act. Notice of this meeting was sent to the Star Ledger on July 3, 2025. In addition, copies of notice were posted on the bulletin board in the Municipal Building, posted on the Town Hall doors, and field in the Office of the Township Clerk. Notices on the bulletin board have remained continuously posted. Proper notice having been given; the Township Clerk is directed to include this statement in the minutes of this meeting.

ROLL CALL

Rayna E. Harris, Township Clerk, read the roll call.

PRESENT

Council Member Lisa Bonanno, Council Member Craig Epps, Council Member David Feuerstein, Council Member Angela Garretson, & Council Member Andrea Hyatt

EXCUSED Council Member Daryl Joyner & Council Member Robert Rios (Entered Meeting at 12:41pm)

ALSO PRESENT

Hope Smith, BA; Glynn Jones, CFO; Gracia Montilus, Township Attorney; Brook L. Nieves, Deputy Clerk, Rayna E. Harris, Township Clerk, Matthew Cove – Officer in Charge, Rashawn Carey – Fire Chief, & Alfuquan Hardy – Recreation Director

ABSENT

Anthony Russomanno, DPW Director

RESOLUTIONS

R-25-163 Approving Additional Municipal Court Session per Month to Address Current Backlog (Tabled)

WHEREAS, there exists a need for an additional session at the Township of Hillside Municipal Court to address backlog, and

WHEREAS, the Administration obtained the permission of the Assignment Judge for the Union County Vicinage to add and conduct an additional court session per month; and

WHEREAS, the additional session will require the *per diem* services of an appointed Municipal Court Judge effective as July 8, 2025, ending December 31, 2025; and

WHEREAS, the *per diem* Municipal Court Judge will be paid at the rate of \$300.00 per session; and

WHEREAS, the Assignment Judge for the Union County Vicinage has approved the use of the Honorable Wilfredo Benitez, J.M.C., to serve on a *per diem* basis; and

WHEREAS, the Administration would also reserve the right to utilize other approved Municipal Court Judges on a *per diem* basis; and

WHEREAS, the Administration would revisit the need for this additional session at the end of the calendar year after reviewing the backlog numbers.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HILLSIDE TOWNSHIP COUNCIL THAT:

1. The Township of Hillside Municipal Court BE AND IS HEREBY authorized to add an additional court session per month to address backlog, effective July 8, 2025, and shall end on December 31, 2025.
2. The Township of Hillside Municipal Court BE AND IS HEREBY permitted to use Honorable Wilfredo Benitez, J.M.C., or other Municipal Court Judges as necessary to serve on a *per diem* basis.

Motion to Table by Council Member Hyatt; Seconded by Council Member Bonanno

All Council Members voted in the Affirmative. **Motion Carries**

R-25-162 Authorizing Emergency Temporary Budget Appropriation for Total Sum of \$2,852,776.00

(Amended \$3,854,871.00)

WHEREAS, an emergent condition has arisen wherein the appropriation set forth in the calendar year of 2025 temporary budget are insufficient to meet the financial obligation as set forth below and the payroll for municipal officers and employees; and

WHEREAS, the permanent budget for the calendar year 2025 has not yet been adopted; and

WHEREAS, the total emergency temporary resolution adopted for the calendar year 2025 pursuant to the provisions of N.J.S.A. 40A:4-20 is \$3,803,871.00 within the Appropriations "CAPS" and \$51,000.00 excluded from the "CAPS" for the Current Fund and, for a Grand Total of \$3,854,871.00; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, by the Township of Hillside, by (not less than two-thirds (2/3) of all members of thereof affirmatively concurring), that, in accordance with the aforementioned statute, the CFY 2025 temporary budget be and the same is hereby amended to provide for an additional emergency temporary appropriation in the total amount of \$3,854,871.00 and distributed as follows:

Appropriations Within "CAPS"		
<u>Department</u>	<u>Type</u>	<u>Amount</u>
Administration and Executive	SW	\$17,632.00
Administration and Executive	OE	\$4,980.00
Economic Development	SW	\$9,500.00
Economic Development	OE	\$
Record Retention	OE	\$
Repair and Maintenance Contracts	OE	\$
Township Clerk's Office	SW	\$20,380.00
Township Clerk's Office	OE	\$5,810.00
Advertising	OE	\$2,000.00
Election	OE	\$10,000.00
Township Council	SW	\$7,209.00
Township Council	OE	\$5,000.00
Financial Administration	SW	\$36,360.00
Financial Administration	OE	\$29,050.00
Annual Audit	OE	\$13,280.00

Assessment of Taxes	SW	\$6,260.00
Assessment of Taxes	OE	\$1,992.00
Computer Services	OE	\$6,640.00
Collection of Taxes	SW	\$13,700.00
Collection of Taxes	OE	\$10,790.00
Legal Service	SW	\$10,600.00
Legal Service	OE	\$55,610.00
Municipal Prosecutor	SW	\$6,250.00
Municipal Prosecutor	OE	\$332.00
Engineering Service	SW	\$
Engineering Service	OE	\$36,520.00
Alcohol Beverage Control Board	OE	\$1,328.00
Buildings and Grounds	SW	\$34,600.00
Buildings and Grounds	OE	\$18,260.00
Planning Board	SW	\$218.75
Planning Board	OE	\$9,960.00
Zoning Cost	SW	\$218.75
Zoning Cost	OE	\$830.00
Postage	OE	\$12,000.00
Unemployment Compensation	OE	\$14,940.00
Workman's Compensation	OE	
Group Insurance Plan for Employee	OE	\$700,000.00
Insurance Other	OE	\$
NJSTDI	OE	\$
Fire	SW	\$560,000.00
Fire	OE	\$36,520.00
Fire Ambulance Service	OE	\$6,640.00
Uniform Fire Safety Act (P.L 1983)	SW	\$17,400.00
Uniform Fire Safety Act (P.L 1983)	OE	\$1,992.00
Police	SW	\$700,000.00
Police	OE	\$46,480.00
Traffic Lights	OE	\$42,450.00
School Crossing Guards	SW	\$16,000.00
Garage Service & Repair	SW	\$7,000.00
Garage Service & Repair	OE	\$16,600.00
Office of Emergency Management	SW	\$1,750.00
Office of Emergency Management	OE	\$2,490.00
Roads Repairs and Maintenance	SW	\$140,000.00
Roads Repairs and Maintenance	OE	\$53,950.00
Garbage and Trash Collection	OE	\$400,000.00
Sewer System	OE	\$9,960.00
Sewer Pumping Station	OE	\$8,300.00
Board of Health	SW	\$13,400.00
Board of Health	OE	\$4,980.00

Dog License Regulation	OE	\$12,948.00
Community Recreation Committee	SW	\$18,000.00
Community Recreation Committee	OE	\$7,304.00
Senior Citizens Program	SW	\$14,400.00
Senior Citizens Program	OE	\$3,154.00
Celebration of Public Events- Mayor	OE	\$996.00
Celebration of Public Events - Municipal Council	OE	\$996.00
Municipal Court	SW	\$21,600.00
Municipal Court	OE	\$9,960.00
Public Defender	OE	\$2,988.00
TV	OE	\$0
Uniform Construction Code Official	SW	\$39,000.00
Uniform Construction Code Official	OE	\$2,490.00
Utilities	OE	\$123,670.00
Street Lighting	OE	\$58,930.00
Fire Hydrant	OE	\$49,800.00
Group Insurance Waiver	OE	\$
Salary Adjustment Account	SW	\$
Accumulated Leave	OE	\$83,000.00
Temporary and Summer Employees	SW	\$18,000.00
Contingent	OE	\$
PERS	OE	\$
PFRS	OE	\$
Social Security (FICA)	OE	\$145,000.00
Consolidated PD/FD	OE	\$
DCRP	OE	\$3,412.50
Total		\$3,803,871.00

Appropriations Excluded from "CAPS"

<u>Department</u>	<u>Type</u>	<u>Amount</u>
Maintenance of Free Public Library	OE	\$
Joint Truck Sewer	OE	\$
Reserve for Tax Appeals	OE	\$
Union County Fire & EMS Dispatch Services	OE	\$
Matching Funds for Grants	OE	\$15,000.00
Union County Health Officer	OE	\$
Capital Improvement Fund	OE	\$
Interest on Notes	OE	\$
Payment of Bond Principal	OE	\$
Interest on Bonds	OE	\$
NJEIT Principal	OE	\$
NJEIT Interest	OE	\$

NJDCA Demolition Loan	OE	\$
UCIA Principal	OE	\$
UCIA Interest	OE	\$
Prior Year Bill Jen Electric	OE	\$36,000.00
Total Temporary Appropriation Excluded From the "CAPS"		\$51,000.00

Swimming Pool

<u>Department</u>	<u>Type</u>	<u>Amount</u>
Swimming Pool S & W	SW	\$0
Swimming Pool O & E	OE	\$0
Swimming Pool Debt Services - Notes	OE	\$0
Swimming Pool Debt Service Interest	OE	\$0
Total Swimming Pool		<u>\$0</u>

Motion to Vote as Amended with the Total Sum of \$3,854,871 Council President Epps; Seconded by Council Member Garretson

All Council Member voted in the Affirmative with the Exception of Council Member Bonanno who Voted Nay and Council Member Feuerstein who Abstain. **Motion Fails**

Motion to reconsider by Council President Epps; Seconded by Council Member Hyatt, **All-In-Favor**

Motion to Accept by Council President Epps; Seconded by Council Member Bonanno

All Council Member voted in the Affirmative with the Exception of Council Member Bonanno who Voted Nay.

Motion Carries

BUDGET INTRODUCTION

R-25-164 Auth. the Introduction of the CY 2025 Municipal Budget (Fails)

Motion by Council Member Feuerstein; Seconded by Council Member Bonanno

All Council Members voted in Nay with the Exception of Council Member Feuerstein & Vice President Rios who Votes Yes. **Motion Fails**

R-25-151 Authorizing the Award of a Professional Services Contract to Hector for the Preparation of a Five-Year Zone Development Plan for the Township of Hillside Urban Enterprise Zone

(Tabled: May 28, 2025)

WHEREAS, the Township of Hillside is an active participant in the New Jersey Urban Enterprise Zone (UEZ) Program; and

WHEREAS, in accordance with N.J.S.A. 52:27H-68, the Township is required to prepare and submit a Five-Year Zone Development Plan outlining the municipality's economic development strategies, goals, and proposed UEZ-funded initiatives; and

WHEREAS, the Township has determined the need to engage a professional planning firm to assist in the development of this plan; and

WHEREAS, HECTOR has submitted a proposal to provide professional planning services for the formulation of a Five-Year Zone Development Plan; and

WHEREAS, HECTOR's proposed scope of work includes outreach to state and regional business organizations, review of existing economic and demographic conditions, assessment of prior UEZ activities, and the preparation of a

WHEREAS, the contract period shall be from July 1, 2025, to June 30, 2026; and

WHEREAS, this contract is being awarded as a professional services contract pursuant to N.J.S.A. 40A:11-5(1)(a)(i) of the Local Public Contracts Law and is therefore not subject to public bidding requirements; and

WHEREAS, the Township has determined that the award of this contract is in the best interests of Hillside's business community and overall economic development.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, by the Township Council of the Township of Hillside that:

1. A professional services contract is hereby awarded to HECTOR for the formulation of a Five-Year Zone Development Plan for an amount not to exceed \$125,000.00.
2. The Mayor, Business Administrator, and/or UEZ Coordinator are authorized to execute the contract and any other necessary documents to effectuate the purposes of this resolution.
3. A copy of this resolution shall be forwarded to the UEZ Coordinator and the New Jersey Urban Enterprise Zone Authority.

Motion from the Floor to Un-table by Council Vice President Rios; No Second. **Motion Fails**

R-25-165 Establishing a Fiscal Review Investigative Committee

WHEREAS, the Township Council of the Township of Hillside is entrusted with fiscal oversight and stewardship of public funds on behalf of the residents; and

WHEREAS, concerns have been raised regarding fiscal management, budgeting practices, procurement procedures, and financial transparency within the municipal government; and

WHEREAS, the Council finds it necessary and appropriate to establish a formal Investigative Committee to conduct a comprehensive fiscal review of municipal operations, including but not limited to vendor payments, department expenditures, budget allocations, and financial reporting practices; and

WHEREAS, the Council has the authority under New Jersey law and the Township's governing structure to investigate any matter affecting the proper administration of municipal finances;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Township Council of the Township of Hillside, County of Union, State of New Jersey, as follows:

1. Establishment

There is hereby established a Fiscal Review Investigative Committee ("Committee") charged with investigating fiscal practices and financial decision-making within the Township of Hillside.

2. Composition

The Committee shall consist of the full 7 (7) members of the Township Council, appointed by the Council President. The Committee shall designate a Chairperson and Vice Chairperson from among its members by majority vote.

3. Scope and Purpose

The purpose of the Committee is to review and investigate matters relating to:

- Budget preparation and amendment processes;
- Expenditure of municipal funds;
- Vendor selection and payment procedures;
- Departmental spending patterns;
- Compliance with applicable fiscal policies and procurement laws;
- Any other matter the Committee deems relevant to ensuring fiscal integrity and responsibility.

4. Powers and Duties

The Committee shall have the authority to:

- Conduct interviews and request written or verbal statements;
- Request, inspect, and analyze documents, contracts, financial records, and correspondence;
- Communicate directly with department heads, employees, professionals, and any individual or entity doing business with the Township;
- Initiate correspondence with current and former vendors or contractors for clarification or documentation;
- Hold public or executive session meetings in accordance with the Open Public Meetings Act;
- Administer oaths and take testimony, if necessary;
- Retain external consultants, forensic accountants, or legal counsel, subject to Council approval, to assist in its review.

5. Reporting

The Committee shall present a written report of its findings, conclusions, and any recommendations for corrective action to the full Township Council no later than August 31st, unless extended by vote of the Council.

6. Transparency and Compliance

The Committee shall conduct all proceedings in compliance with the New Jersey Open Public Meetings Act (N.J.S.A. 10:4-6 et seq.) and the Open Public Records Act (N.J.S.A. 47:1A-1 et seq.), unless exempted by law.

7. Severability

If any section, provision, or clause of this resolution is found to be invalid or unenforceable, the remainder shall remain in full force and effect.

8. Effective Date

This resolution shall take effect immediately upon adoption.

Motion from the floor by Council Member Garretson; Seconded by Council Member Hyatt
All Council Members voted in the Affirmative with the Exception of Council Vice President who Abstain.

Motion Carries

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Motion to OPEN Public Comments by Council Member Hyatt; Seconded by Council Member Feuerstein,

All-In-Favor

Janice Caldwell – 140 Baltimore Ave.

- The community is concerned about the proposed property tax increase and the lack of a balanced budget submission. Despite the mayor's request for more funding, the council has yet to receive a balanced budget to review or approve. Residents appreciate the council's efforts and ask that no additional funds be given to the mayor or her administration. They are willing to delay projects like the pool or the library if necessary. The priority is to protect taxpayers' money and pause any further spending until a new administration is in place.

Mattie Holloway – 141 Bailey Ave.

- I support the decision to send the budget back and believe the administration still has an opportunity to make meaningful changes before resubmitting it. To do nothing would be a sign of disrespect to the residents of Hillside. I urge the council to review the budget thoroughly, examining padded line items, unnecessary staffing increases, and excessive insurance costs. A 13.75% tax increase is unaffordable for many — especially seniors and working families — and could drive people out of town. Over the past two years, taxes have increased by more than 20%, which is unacceptable. I ask the council to make tough but necessary recommendations in the best interest of the residents.
- Question: why are these meetings being held during the day, at 12 or 1 p.m., when most people are at work? We talk about open communication, but many Hillside residents don't know what's going on. Only a few of

us are able to sign in. These meetings should be held in the evening and in person, so the public can attend, be heard, and stay informed

Aldeana Mitchell – 1431 Maple Ave;

- I agree with what others have said — we can't afford more taxes, especially with services still lacking. The budget shouldn't be passed as-is. I appreciate the council reviewing it and urge you to stop automatically approving everything. Discussions, like adding a judge, should be transparent — residents deserve to know what's happening. With \$45 million in debt, raising taxes further is unacceptable. Please go back to the drawing board and put the residents first.

Aurthur Kobitz – 327 Trinity Place

- I've seen both sides, and it's clear the mayor has already spent most of the budget. One major issue is that when she clashes with someone, they end up getting paid to stay home sometimes for years while still receiving raises. That doesn't make sense. We're paying high salaries to people who are not working, instead of either having them retire or return to work. This kind of mismanagement is part of the budget problem, and it's likely why the mayor delays submitting it every year. I've been warning about this for a long time.

Audrey Thornton – 286 Florence Ave.

- Every time I join one of these meetings, I leave confused and disheartened. The dysfunction between the council and the mayor is troubling and completely undermines what I thought I understood about how local government should work. As a lifelong resident and homeowner in Hillside, it's painful to watch the township decline. The steep tax increases feel like they're pushing longtime residents out, and it's hard not to wonder if that's intentional. There seems to be more focus on personal agendas than on serving the people. What once made me proud of this town has faded. I truly hope there can be unity and accountability before Hillside loses what made it special.

Tirashia Jackson – 252 Dora Ave.

- She wanted to know if this meeting is mainly due to workers not being paid.
- Approving a tax hike would be devastating for Hillside residents. I also have concerns about the pool and the recreation center. From speaking with local teens, it seems they feel neglected and lack access to community resources. We need to consider not just young children, but also preteens, teens, and seniors — they are all vital to our community. We must protect our residents and not approve any tax increases without seeing real solutions.

Rayba Watson – 830 Jerome Ave.

- Thank you, Council President Epps, for your statement to the attorney — it's important that every voice is heard. Sometimes laws and rules are cited selectively, so I appreciate your consistency. My question is: since the administration first proposed the 13.7% tax increase, have any council members made recommendations for cuts? And if so, how did the administration respond?
- Thank you for your answer. My last question is: after the council makes its recommendations, will there be another public meeting to discuss those recommendations? Or will the administration simply accept or reject them, leaving us stuck with the final decision without further public input?

Aida Sanogo – 265 Ogden Way.

- We're new here, we moved in 2001 so I'm still getting my bearings. As a new mother, I'm seeing daycare fees rising, and now with this proposed tax hike, it's hard because our salaries haven't increased at the same rate. It's tough just to afford groceries and plan for our kids' education and future savings. Increasing taxes like this right now feels unacceptable. I want to thank you for sending the budget back for revision.
- My question is: if the administration sends back the same budget again, can the council make specific cuts themselves and move forward, or will this just continue going back and forth?

Motion to CLOSE Public Comments by Council Member Bonanno; Seconded by Council Member Feuerstein,

All-In-Favor

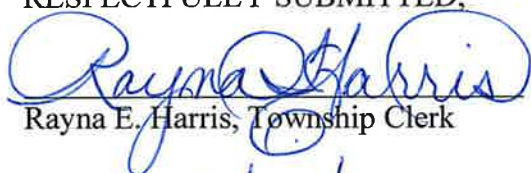
Council Remarks

Council Member David Feuerstein
Council Member Andrea Hyatt
Council Member Angela Garretson
Council Member Lisa Bonanno
Council Member Daryl Joyner
Council Vice President Robert Rios
Council President Craig Epps

Motion to Adjourned by Council Member Hyatt; Seconded Council Member Garretson, All-In-Favor

Adjourned at 1:58pm:

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED,


Rayna E. Harris, Township Clerk


Craig Epps, Council President

DATE: 08/05/2025