

TOWNSHIP OF HILLSIDE
SPECIAL MEETING OF THE TOWNSHIP COUNCIL
MINUTES

September 2, 2025

The Special Meeting of the Township of Hillside Township Council was held on September 2, 2025, in the Municipal Building, 1409 Liberty Avenue Hillside, New Jersey 07205 at 6:06 pm.

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. 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 Andrea Hyatt & Council Member Robert Rios

EXCUSED Council Member Daryl Joyner, Council Member Angela Garretson, & Gracia Montilus, Township Attorney

ALSO PRESENT

Hope Smith, BA; Glynn Jones, CFO; Brook L. Nieves, Deputy Clerk, & Rayna E. Harris, Township Clerk

DIRECTORS ABSENT

Matthew Cove, Office in Charge (PD); Rashawn Carey, Fire Chief (FD); Alfuquan Hardy, Recreation Director; & Anthony Russomanno, DPW Director

BUDGET PRESENTATION

By Council Member Feuerstein

CY 2025 BUDGET PUBLIC HEARING

Motion to **OPEN** CY 2025 Budget Public Comments by Council Member Hyatt; Seconded by Council Vice President Rios. **All-In-Favor**

Janice Caldwell, 140 Baltimore Ave:

- **Question:** In two years, what is going to happen to the residents of Hillside due to the tax assessment? The council knew about the assessment and should have been making a plan so that the residents of Hillside wouldn't be hit so hard. The pool was closed, and now there is a spray park that doesn't accommodate all the kids in Hillside and has no bathroom facilities. The council was not honest—there was no transparency, and they misused the residents' money.
- If the council needs help with the budget, please involve others—not just the finance committee.

Motion to give Mrs. Cadwell an extra 3 minutes by Council Member Hyatt; Seconded by Council member Bonanno,

Council President did not ask for a roll call for the Motion.

Aldeana Mitchell, 1431 Maple Ave;

- She does not like the fact that the mayor will be increasing taxes on the residents. She understands that the council is limited in what it can do. The council does not sign any checks, nor do they supervise the funds they are expected to work with. Therefore, the issue lies with the administration.
- At times, the council has no idea how much money the administration is spending. The blame should be placed where it belongs. Too much money is being spent on a year-to-year basis, with no flexibility to adjust, especially since the budget is delivered so late.

Damian Bushay, 32 Fairbanks St:

- Why is the budget late every year? How is anyone supposed to fix it now when there are only three months left in the year?
- I've lived in this town for over 37 years, and every year there's a tax increase. Why are we building a new library when most residents already have internet access at home?
- Fix what we already have in this town and stop raising taxes. Renegotiate the contracts and insurance packages instead of continuing to push the burden onto residents.

Rayba Watson, 830 Jerome Ave:

- When was the last time the budget was submitted on time? What is the length of the employment contracts, and how long has the council known about the tax increase?
- Council Member Feuerstein is telling residents to be scared about the tax assessment, but it's not fair to make residents feel paranoid without clear answers.
- Has everyone on the council seen the budget and sent their recommendation?

Marjorie Hargrave, 31 Bailey Ave:

- I took a glance at the budget and quickly noticed that it still includes police officers who have been retired for over a year. I also saw that Hope Smith's position in the Building Department is still listed, even though she hasn't worked there in over eight years.
- There are several ways to reduce the budget if the council takes the time to go through it carefully. I would also hope the council allows those with real expertise in this field to weigh in—and takes their recommendations seriously.

Sheila Hendricks, 132 Bailey Ave:

- **Question:** What is the Council President's position on the budget? Did he personally review it to identify where potential cuts could be made?
- Regarding the two individuals still listed in the budget, as mentioned by Mrs. Hargrave—is that due to placeholder or open salary lines?
- Would love the opportunity to go through the budget herself and offer her input. If the council is open to receiving her help, she is more than willing to contribute.
- **Question for the CFO:** Who is currently reviewing the town's financial records to ensure everything is being done properly? And who serves as the auditor for the town?

Janelle Davis, 1559 Lesile St:

- **Question:** Given the substantial size of the town's annual budget, is there a monthly budget in place to ensure that expenses are not front-loaded early in the year?
- It also seems that auditor controls are not being properly addressed, and there have been issues with receiving consistent financial reports. What checks and balances are in place to monitor the mayor's spending decisions? Who is responsible for checking the check-writer?

Motion to **ADJOURN** CY 2025 Budget Public Hearing by Council Vice President Rios; Seconded by Council Member Feuerstein. **All-In-Favor**

COUNCIL REMARKS

Council Member Hyatt, Council Member Feuerstein, Council Member Bonanno, Council Vice President Rios, and Council President Epps offered remarks.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Motion to **OPEN** Public Comments by Council Member Hyatt; Seconded by Council Member Feuerstein, **All-In-Favor**

Danene Davis, 478 Conant St.

- She is heartbroken to see the council divided, when the hope was that they would work together—not against each other. She supports Councilwoman Bonanno’s idea of forming a committee to gather ideas and provide help with the budget.
- Hillside needs to do better—our children are at stake, and so are our seniors. This is a time for unity, not division.

Sheila Hendricks, 132 Bailey Ave:

- She would love to see the council work together, because the division is obvious—you can see it just by looking at the town. It doesn’t look like it used to. The residents depend on the council to come together and fix both the town and the budget.

Janice Caldwell, 140 Baltimore Ave:

- She’s not heartbroken, she’s really upset about what’s happening in the town. If there is even one person on the council who has the ability to make meaningful changes to the budget, don’t second guess it, do what’s best for the people of Hillside.
- Residents don’t come to every meeting because they trust the council to work on their behalf. Don’t break that trust.

Rayba Watson, 830 Jerome Ave.

- When would be the next council meeting?

Tony Thomspon, Belview Terrace.

- He was home watching the meeting and got so upset by some of the things that were said, he got in his car and drove straight there. He’s lived in Hillside for nearly 50 years and has seen a lot—but it’s heartbreaking to watch how the town is deteriorating.
- He’s tired of what keeps happening in these meetings. Hillside is filled with issues, and it’s time for everyone to come together and fix this town.

Joane Givens, 226 Wilder St.

- A year ago, her son came back home from college and was deeply disappointed—he couldn’t believe how much had changed for the worse in Hillside. For her, it was heartbreaking to see his reaction. Please reevaluate the direction things are going and come together—for the sake of the residents of Hillside.

Motion to **CLOSE** Public Comments by Council Member Hyatt; Seconded by Council Member Bonanno,
All-In-Favor

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

Adjourned at 7:57 pm.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED,


Rayna E. Harris, Township Clerk


Craig Epps, Council President

DATE: 09/12/2025