

TOWN OF PHILLIPSBURG
COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

January 16, 2024— 7:00 P.M.

1. **CALL TO ORDER 7:00 pm** **By CP Marino**
2. **OPEN PUBLIC MEETING ACT STATEMENT** **Read by CVP Paulus**
3. **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE** **All**
4. **INVOCATION** **Led by Councilman Scerbo**
5. **ROLL CALL – Present - Marino, Paulus, Clark, Kennedy, Scerbo**
-Also in attendance: Mayor Piazza, Business Administrator Hall, Attorney Rich Wenner, and Deputy Clerk Turner
6. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES – December 19, 2023 Regular Meeting Minutes**
December 19, 2023 Executive Session Minutes
January 1, 2024 Regular Meeting Minutes

ROLL CALL **Motion Carries 5-0**

Councilmembers	First	Second	Yea	Nay	Abstain	Absent
Councilman Clark		X	X			
Councilman Kennedy			X			
Councilman Scerbo			X			
Council VP Paulus	X		1/1/24 regular		12/19/23 regular & Executive	
Council President Marino			X			

7. **RESOLUTION - CP Marino asked that Resolution 2024-18 Interfund Transfers be voted on first and separate from the consent agenda.**
Motion to pass Resolution 2024-18 RESOLUTION TO PROVIDE FOR INTERFUND TRANSFERS

ROLL CALL **Motion Carries 5-0**

Councilmembers	First	Second	Yea	Nay	Abstain	Absent
Councilman Clark	X		X			
Councilman Kennedy			X			
Councilman Scerbo			X			
Council VP Paulus		X	X			
Council President Marino			X			

8. BILLS LIST

ROLL CALL

Motion Carries

5-0

Councilmembers	First	Second	Yea	Nay	Abstain	Absent
Councilman Clark			X			
Councilman Kennedy			X			
Councilman Scerbo		X	X			
Council VP Paulus	X		X			
Council President Marino			X			

9. ANNOUNCEMENTS/PRESENTATIONS – Mayor’s Report – Mayor Randy Piazza, Jr.

During this past week, our municipality has seen significant development in certain areas, notably in collaboration with Habitat for Humanity and NORWESCAP. We successfully saw the transformation of a vacant lot into a single family home. We’ve also identified various grants that have been submitted for Council’s consideration at an upcoming special meeting on January 30th. This meeting is also designated for the Green Acres Public Hearing which will help to remediate any outstanding Green Acres issues that we have. In an effort to enhance community engagement, I’ve conducted meetings with local groups to understand their long-term plans and for opportunities to reach mutual goals. Additionally, extensive interviews have taken place to fill long-standing vacant positions within the municipality. The focus extends to improving our operations through the evaluation of software contracts, communication services, and other means to better serve the community. Simultaneously, dedicated efforts are underway in crafting the 2024 municipal budget. Meetings with each department aim to address specific needs, funding shortfalls and issues that were neglected in the past few years. Acknowledging the recent significant snowfall, the first in close to two years, I commend the exceptional efforts of our Police, Emergency Personnel, and Department of Public Works for their efficient handling of the event. Thank you.

10. MAYORAL APPOINTMENTS

Brian Grace – Public Defender

Library Board

Jennifer Paulus – Term ending 12/31/28

Renee Bickert – Term ending 12/31/27

ROLL CALL

Motion for Brian Grace Fails 2-2-1-0

Motion for Jennifer Paulus Fails 2-2-1-0

Motion for Renee Bickert Passes 3-2

Councilmembers	First	Second	Yea	Nay	Abstain	Absent
Councilman Clark				X		
Councilman Kennedy				X		

Councilman Scerbo		X	X			
Council VP Paulus	X		Renee Bickert		Brian Grace Jennifer Paulus	
Council President Marino			X			

Councilman Matthew Scerbo nominated Pete Pisillo for the Library Board

Motion – Peter Pisillo Library Board – Term ending 12/31/28

ROLL CALL

Motion carries

3-2

Councilmembers	First	Second	Yea	Nay	Abstain	Absent
Councilman Clark				X		
Councilman Kennedy				X		
Councilman Scerbo	X		X			
Council VP Paulus		X	X			
Council President Marino			X			

CP Marino stated the Mayor will need to appoint a different person for Public Defender. Court cannot be held without one. Mayor Piazza stated that Brian Grace had been previously appointed by Mayor Tersigni and confirmed by the Town Council. Councilman Clark requested background on Brian Grace. Mayor Piazza stated Mr. Grace came in at a lower price point than the current Public Defender. He has knowledge of our court workings, has worked with the Judge and Prosecutor, and is familiar with the caseloads. Mayor Piazza has faith he can carry out the duties. Councilman Clark stated he would change his vote.

Motion – Public Defender – Brian Grace

ROLL CALL

Motion carries

4-0-1-0

Councilmembers	First	Second	Yea	Nay	Abstain	Absent
Councilman Clark			X			
Councilman Kennedy			X			
Councilman Scerbo	X		X			
Council VP Paulus		X			X	
Council President Marino			X			

11. PUBLIC DISCUSSION ON AGENDA ITEMS –

- Ed Bullock, 244 Warren St, Phillipsburg – speaking as past President of the Library Board of Trustees asked who the new appointees replaced on the board. Attorney Wenner stated Josh Winisko and Mr. Bullock were replaced. Mr. Bullock stated this is his 50th year volunteering for the town and he is disappointed there was not a reason given for him not being reappointed.

- Aaron Coleman, 3 Fairview Heights, Phillipsburg – Mr. Coleman spoke on the NORWESCAP NPP funding. He started the Railroad Festival and was instrumental in opening the Train Station. His experience getting funding for events and projects has not been good. He is still waiting for payment of invoices submitted several weeks ago. Mr. Coleman proceeded to recite a timeline of

the process of funding and requesting funding throughout 2023 and of email questions he submitted regarding funding for various projects to which he has not received responses. Emails regarding receipts submitted for payment have not received timely, or any, responses. Mr. Coleman stated the accounting records for NPP funding, administered by NORWESCAP, are a mess and outlined several instances that appear to show monies unaccounted for. He believes the Holly Jolly Festival and Union Station Holiday Market met all the requirements for NPP funding. He did not receive any replies to multiple requests for their funding. In addition, Mr. Coleman was told by TAP Into that the Railroad Festival, Holly Jolly Festival and Holiday Market were not included in the TAP Into advertising contract because he was “private”. He wants to know why his events were not included. He also spoke about Rbot Metro, located at 100-102 South Main St, Phillipsburg, which was awarded an \$11,915 contract for the kiosk on South Main Street. The kiosk is still in a state of disrepair despite a check request submitted in July 2023. He asked why did the NPP coordinator award that contract to their landlord? He feels the town needs to take back the NPP funding, create a committee, and disperse funds evenly. CP Marino stated Resolution 2023-19 will be tabled until this is investigated, and any findings will be made public. CP Marino requested that he, Business Administrator Hall, Attorney Wenner, and Mayor Piazza get together to review this information and get answers.

12. ORDINANCES FOR 1st READING

O2024-03 A REDEVELOPMENT PLAN ORDINANCE OF TOWN OF PHILLIPSBURG, COUNTY OF WARREN, STATE OF NEW JERSEY, PERTAINING TO BLOCK 1005, LOT 13, COMMONLY KNOWN AS 540 MARSHALL STREET, AND DESIGNATED AN AREA IN NEED OF REHABILITATION BY THE TOWN OF PHILLIPSBURG, IN ACCORDANCE WITH N.J.S.A. 40A:12A-7 ENTITLED “40A:12A-7. ADOPTION OF REDEVELOPMENT PLAN”

ROLL CALL

Motion 5-0

Councilmembers	First	Second	Yea	Nay	Abstain	Absent
Councilman Clark			X			
Councilman Kennedy			X			
Councilman Scerbo	X		X			
Council VP Paulus		X	X			
Council President Marino			X			

13. ORDINANCES FOR 2ND READING

O2024-01 AN ORDINANCE OF THE TOWN OF PHILLIPSBURG, COUNTY OF WARREN, STATE OF NEW JERSEY AMENDING CHAPTER 5, ADMINISTRATION OF GOVERNMENT, SECTION 27, MEETINGS, IN ORDER TO ADJUST THE SCHEDULE OF COUNCIL MEETINGS.

ROLL CALL

Motion 5-0

Councilmembers	First	Second	Yea	Nay	Abstain	Absent
Councilman Clark			X			
Councilman Kennedy			X			
Councilman Scerbo		X	X			

Council VP Paulus	X		X			
Council President Marino			X			

Public Discussion – Joe Meyner, 292 S Main St, Phillipsburg, requested a copy of the 2024 meeting dates. He was told it is in the agenda packet.

Council Discussion – Councilman Kennedy asked why the dates were changed. CP Marino stated that the many Monday holidays interfere with the public receiving information before the meetings.

O2024-02 AN ORDINANCE OF THE TOWN OF PHILLIPSBURG, COUNTY OF WARREN, STATE OF NEW JERSEY ESTABLISHING TITLES AND SALARY RANGES APPLICABLE THERETO

ROLL CALL

Motion

3-2

Councilmembers	First	Second	Yea	Nay	Abstain	Absent
Councilman Clark				X		
Councilman Kennedy		X		X		
Councilman Scerbo	X		X			
Council VP Paulus			X			
Council President Marino			X			

Public Discussion – None

Council Discussion – Councilman Clark stated he voted no on the first reading and will vote no tonight because it is adding a lot of new positions which increase spending on the budget. He cannot vote yes until he can see the effects on the budget. He would also like to see job descriptions for many of the new positions. While there are job descriptions on the Civil Service website, he'd like to see how they will be coordinated and embedded with the current staff. There is a salary range for a full-time Mayor and a part-time Mayor listed. Will the Mayor be full or part-time? If part-time, he'd like the salary range adjusted to the \$5,500 to \$10,000 range, which is more in line with the Council and Council President stipends.

Councilman Kennedy also questioned the two Mayoral salary ranges and asked if it had been established whether Mayor Piazza will be full-time or part-time? CP Marino stated it had not yet been established.

Councilman Scerbo thanked BA Hall who reviewed the titles, job descriptions, and salary ranges with him. He recommended Council members reach out to Mr. Hall with any questions.

- 14. RESOLUTIONS** – CP Marino stated that Resolution 2024-19 has been pulled from the agenda and will not be voted on.

RESOLUTIONS ** CONSENT AGENDA **

Matters listed on the Consent Agenda Resolutions are considered routine and will be enacted by one motion of the Council and one roll call vote. There will be no separate discussion of these items unless a Council member requests an item to be removed for consideration

R2024-15 RESOLUTION ESTABLISHING MEETING DATES FOR YEAR 2024

R2024-16 RESOLUTION APPROVING JUNK DEALER LICENSE FOR 2024

R2024-17 RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING A REFUND OF ESCROW IN THE AMOUNT OF \$385.00 TO KENT CORCORAN

ROLL CALL

Motion Carries

5-0

Councilmembers	First	Second	Yea	Nay	Abstain	Absent
Councilman Clark			X			
Councilman Kennedy			X			
Councilman Scerbo	X		X			
Council VP Paulus		X	X			
Council President Marino			X			

R2024-20 RESOLUTION APPROVING COUNCIL ASSIGNMENTS FOR 2024-20 – pulled from consent agenda by CP Marino. CP Marino amends the Resolution adding Redevelopment Committee with Councilman Scerbo and himself assigned to that committee.

ROLL CALL

Motion Carries

3-2

Councilmembers	First	Second	Yea	Nay	Abstain	Absent
Councilman Clark				X		
Councilman Kennedy				X		
Councilman Scerbo	X		X			
Council VP Paulus		X	X			
Council President Marino			X			

Discussion -

15. OLD BUSINESS – Councilman Scerbo spoke about the Open Space Committee. Prior to being elected to Council, he had questioned why no meetings were held for 2 years. He discovered the previous administration had failed to follow through with the ordinance and there was confusion about who had been appointed Council Liaison. The by-laws should be reviewed, members removed with or without cause who can be reappointed and start fresh so that projects can be determined and funded.

Councilman Kennedy has been pushing for these committee meetings to take place. He has insisted the Open Space and Rec committees meet.

Councilman Clark stated he was the liaison to the Open Space Committee and there was no confusion about that. Members of the committee were appointed legally and are active. When he was appointed liaison, the committee was not functioning. Councilman Clark sponsored a referendum to keep the existing Open Space fund available for another 5 years. He sees no reason to remove legally appointed members just to clean the slate. The vacancies should be filled, and the current members should remain.

CP Marino stated it was his understanding that the appointments were for last year and if they wish to be reappointed, they can submit a letter stating that. He will honor the appointments made last year.

Councilman Scerbo stated that meetings are still not being held and money is sitting in a fund. He sees that as a failure of duties.

CP Marino stated appointments to the Open Space Committee will be on the first Work Session meeting agenda and the ordinance will be followed.

16. NEW BUSINESS – No New Business

17. MOTIONS – No Motions

18. PUBLIC PETITIONS – No Public Petitions

19. COUNCIL OPEN TIME

Councilman Scerbo thanked the EMS, Police, DPW, and Fire Chief Hay for their excellent work during the snowstorm.

Councilman Clark thanked the First Responders for their work during the Jan 7th and Jan 16th snowstorms. They are a cornerstone of this town and protect the community. Councilman Clark congratulated Mr. Wayne Sherrer whose book “Phorgotten No More: Glimpses of the African-American Presence in Phillipsburg, NJ 1777-2021” was published on Martin Luther King, Jr. Day. It highlights the history that has been overlooked, good and bad. Councilman Clark hopes this can be used to attract people to the rich history of Phillipsburg and showcase how the African-American community has contributed to the town. He recognized Vicky Mendez-Branch and everyone who was featured in the book. Councilman Clark announced the Phillipsburg Library is accepting applications for a full time Senior Library Assistant. Councilman Clark spoke to Aaron Coleman and stated that everything he has done has been appreciated, he has done remarkable things for the town, and people have noticed.

Councilman Kennedy thanked the Police, First Responders, and especially the DPW employees. Our guys do a much better job than other municipalities. He thanked Mr. Bullock for his many years of work with the Library.

Council Vice President Paulus thanked Mr. Bullock for his years of volunteering for the town. She thanked the DPW and First Responders for their work during the snowstorms. Council VP Paulus also thanked Mr. Coleman for everything he has done. Everyone appreciates his hard work. She thanked Mr. Coleman for bringing the NPP fund to their attention and asked him to send the information he had collected.

Council President Marino thanked Mr. Bullock for his years of service to the people of Phillipsburg. He thanked Business Administrator Hall for calling a Snow Emergency and promptly notifying everyone. A Snow Emergency prompts residents to move their cars from the streets, allowing them to be cleared properly.

20. EXECUTIVE SESSION (IF REQUIRED) – No Executive Session

21. ADJOURNMENT – 7:47 PM

Councilman Clark moved to adjourn. Seconded by Council VP Paulus.

Ayes: 5

Nays: 0

Absent: 0

Motion passed.