

Minutes of the Regular Meeting of the Morris Plains Planning Board held on September 15, 2025 at 7:30 P.M. in the Council Chambers, 531 Speedwell Ave. Morris Plains, NJ. The following members were present:

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Present: Mr. Andrew Wolff
Ms. Marianne Steckert
Mr. Michael Garavaglia, Chair
Mr. Bill Houston
Mayor Jason C. Karr
Mrs. Suzanne McCluskey

William Ryden, Borough Engineer
Alyse Landano-Hubbard, representing Mr. Brewer, Bd. Attorney
Karen Coffey, Board Secretary

Absent: Mr. Steve Augenblick
Mr. John Bezold, Vice Chair
Ms. Elizabeth Leheny, Borough Planner

The meeting was called to order by Mr. Garavaglia. Mr. Garavaglia made the statement that adequate notice of this meeting has been published and posted in accordance with Chapter 231 of the Public Law of 1975, "Open Public Meetings Act." This meeting is a judicial proceeding. Any questions or comments must be limited to issues that are relevant to what the Board may legally consider in reaching a decision and decorum appropriate to a judicial hearing must be maintained at all times.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Mr. Wolff stated on page 385, it should read Mr. Wolff rather than Board Member. Mrs. McCluskey made a motion to approve the minutes of the August 18, 2025 meeting, with correction, seconded by Ms. Steckert. Voice Vote. All in Favor.

Motion carried.

COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

Lee Connor – 2 Tower Hill Road – gave an update on Plan Better Morris Plains. It is a resident led and funded group. They met during the summer to define issues and discuss how Morris Plains Boards and Commissions work. They considered what are reasonable and doable ideas to envision Morris Plains as it goes into its second century. As part of the planning they joined NJ Highlands Coalition, a 501(c)(3) non-profit. They have become a fiscal sponsor. That means any donations to the group are now tax deductible. They have access to a wide range of planning and development expertise throughout the State. Plan Better Morris Plains is asking for public education and participation in land use decisions. They are requesting a timely review of Ordinance 14-2023 and the Morris Plains Master Plan. They sent out the first

newsletter earlier this month. You can send an e-mail to PlanbetterMP@gmail.com and the newsletter will be forwarded to you. The newsletter highlighted in its initial review, the NJ Dept. of Transportation expressed concern about the McDonald's project. Specifically, NDOT expressed major concerns about traffic impact, safety of children at nearby schools and the increased risk of collisions at an already busy intersection. This information was obtained through an OPRA request to NJDOT. She urges Board members to not only review how the hearings went in light of testimony presented by applicant's traffic expert compared to this review from NJDOT. Future projects will inevitably come before this Board. She is urging the Borough to conduct an independent traffic study to develop a detailed traffic assessment for each permitted use under Ordinance 18-2023. To the public's knowledge, no such an assessment was undertaken by the Borough Planner when the Ordinance was being drafted by the Planning Board. They are meeting with groups this Fall, elected officials, appointed officials, Boards and Committees. They would welcome anyone from the Board to meet with Plan Better Morris Plains. She thanked the members for their service to the Planning Board.

There were no more comments. This portion of the meeting was closed.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Minor Site Plan Committee

- None

Master Plan Review Committee

- None

CORRESPONDENCE AND BILLS

Mr. Wolff read the voucher(s) for payment.

Phillips Preiss Grygiel Leheny & Hughes Housing Element – June 2025	PO #20251573	\$1,980.00
Maraziti & Falcon, LLP General Legal Services – February 2025	PO #20251677	\$ 1,452.50
Anderson & Denzler Engineering Services – August 2025	PO #2025181	\$193.40
Maraziti & Falcon, LLP Legal Services – August 2025	PO #20251682	\$1,960.00
Maraziti & Falcon, LLP Legal Services – McDonald's – August 2025	PO #20251683	\$2,017.35

Mayor Karr moved to approve the Purchase Orders, seconded by Mr. Houston.

Roll Call

Yeas: Mr. Wolff, Ms. Steckert, Mr. Garavaglia, Mr. Houston, Mayor Karr,
Mrs. McCluskey,
Nays: None
Abstain: None
Absent: Mr. Augenblick, Mr. Bezold

Motion carried.

Mrs. Coffey stated she received an email from Mrs. Cecere which the Mayor responded to, stating her questions can be answered through the Building Department and Zoning Office. She is requesting information on the demolition of the Friendly's building. Mrs. Coffey stated all Board members received a copy of the email.

APPLICATIONS

There are no applications on tonight's agenda.

OLD BUSINESS

Revised Application Process

Comments from Board Members

Mr. Garavaglia reminded members this was a joint effort between Board of Adjustment, Planning Board and the Governing body. Mr. Augenblick and Mr. Bezold forwarded comments to Mr. Garavaglia as they are not in attendance at this meeting.

Mrs. McCluskey asked if the comments will be shared with the Board. Mr. Garavaglia replied yes. Mr. Bezold's comment, in summary, was it looks good.

Mr. Garavaglia has asked him to send more information. Mr. Augenblick's comments were more about instructions to use the checklist. Mr. Garavaglia will share the emails with the Board.

Mr. Wolff – The Board of Adjustment comments show that they are supportive of the overall project. Today he submitted fairly extensive comments. General suggestion was how to make the application flow better. Also, suggestion that we talk to Mrs. Coffey and the people in the office who have to deal with the documents. He believes placement of information in the application can make it more streamlined. Some information should be pulled up in to the header: location, tax map. Items that were left out of the revised application: signatures, certifications, permission to visit site, 45-day rule should be considered to go back in. Mr. Wolff stated on some documents there is a section on products in a space, potentially hazardous waste.

Mayor Karr suggested Mr. Wolff send his comments to Mrs. Coffey and she will distribute.

Ms. Steckert – When looking at best practices, many municipalities have in their administrative packets some information that we have on the revised application: escrow fees, public notice, technical submission checklist. She will put her comments in an email and send to Mrs. Coffey. She saw a lot of municipalities have one form, there are sections that apply specifically to the Board of Adjustment or Planning Board. On the revised application, she did not see design waiver or conditional use. She did not see a spot where you see all the different people and their address, email or phone number. She did not see information on traffic consultant and planning consultant.

Mr. Houston – He asked Mr. Ryden, re. application checklist, is the intent for the applicant to go through and make sure they have all the supporting documentation in order for Mr. Ryden to review.

Mr. Ryden replied this is the list that tells applicant what they need to supply to the Board to have a complete application and be heard by the Board.

Mr. Houston stated the purpose was to streamline the current application not necessarily to list all documents that the applicant would need to provide in the checklist.

Mr. Ryden stated they are evaluated on completeness. The Board gets to delve into specifics. Engineering and Planning Reports will provide comments and then the Board deliberates.

Mr. Houston stated the purpose of the checklist is to make sure the applicant has all documentation in place.

Mayor Karr – Board of Adjustment minutes of June 23, 2025 states that they do not feel there is a need for Board to reviewing for completeness. Why is that?

Mr. Ryden replied a checklist is not specific to any discipline. It is administrative. This could be done by an administrator but typically it is either the Engineer or Planner.

Mayor Karr asked who does completeness and when does that take place.

Mr. Ryden stated after the application is filed with the Board Secretary, she forwards it to Mr. Ryden and he will do the completeness process. He then creates a report. In some towns, if he deems an application the Board accepts that. He cannot grant waivers, only the Board can do that. He believes this saves time but it is up to the Board. If there are deficiencies, the Board Secretary will advise the applicant.

Mayor Karr asked if the application is deemed incomplete prior to the meeting and the Board accepts Mr. Ryden's letter for an incomplete application, there is no need for the applicant to come to the Board meeting.

Mr. Ryden replied that is correct, it would need to be rescheduled

Mayor Karr asked if deemed complete, the Professionals come to the hearing?

Mr. Ryden replied that is correct.

Mayor Karr asked how questions get answered if professionals are not at the meeting and the Board accepts Mr. Ryden's completeness letter.

Mr. Ryden stated the acceptance of the completeness letter does not go to the merits of the application. It simply means an applicant is ready to make their case to the Board.

If there are questions from the applicant, a letter is sent to the Board and it will be taken into consideration. His letter will also state if he agrees or disagrees with waiver requests. Documents need to be part of the application. Mr. Ryden never entertains requests to send a document at a later time.

Mayor Karr stated the glossary is good. Some applicants have 2 front yards; he does not see that in the document. He asked if soil disturbance is part of the application checklist.

Mr. Ryden will check.

Mayor Karr asked if minor site plan approval still comes to the Board.

Mr. Ryden said everything still comes to the Board.

Mayor Karr stated utilities listed are public water and sewer.

Mrs. McCluskey – On the cover sheet of the package, she agrees with Mr. Rizo's (Board of Adjustment Member) and Mark Karr's comment that they would like a glossary. She disagrees that Mr. Ryden and the Planner do not have to attend the completeness hearing.

Mr. Ryden stated he never said they would not come to the meeting. He said there is no need for the Engineer and Planner to do the completeness review.

Mrs. McCluskey suggested a joint review. She also did not see anywhere in the documents whether or not we need a traffic engineer. In the application for variance, scale of all drawings should be specified. Some information is duplicated, ex. zone. She does not understand why original plus 10 copies is requested.

Mrs. Coffey replied it is distributed to all members of the Board, all professionals, Zoning Officer, Fire Sub-Code Official, Police Chief, Morris County Planning Board and sometimes the Fire Chief. She receives one (1) original application and 19 copies.

Mr. Ryden stated the number will be up to the Board Secretary as to how many copies are needed.

Mr. Houston stated part of the process is to streamline. Many organizations will take electronic versions of the documents. Paper documents are not being eliminated, just reduced.

Mrs. Coffey suggested large copies of architectural and engineering drawings for the Professionals and smaller copies (11 x 17) for the Board members.

Mrs. McCluskey does not want small copies for the Board. Shae also stated floor plans for each floor, not just the first floor, should be provided. Photographs of all properties within 500' of subject property, sometimes this is reduced to 200'. When a variance is required, photos are needed of actual properties. She stated there should be a list of all experts and who is going to testify. They have to certify on every application that they are served by public water and sewer. Borough does not want anyone to have their own water, sewer or septic. Easements or proposed right of ways should be provided. When the Board gets the process documents back she requested they not be this way; it was difficult to do a comparison to the current document. She wants a proposed complete package of how this will be presented to the public. Mrs. McCluskey will send her comments to the Board Secretary for distribution.

Mr. Ryden stated Ms. Keller, Planner, does not have any major feedback.

Mr. Garavaglia stated he received an email from Ms. Leheny stating she did not have any concerns. He thanked the Board for their input. Each Board member will send their comments to Mrs. Coffey. She will collect them and send them back out to the Board. She will also send the comments to the Application Committee.

Mrs. Coffey confirmed that the Planning Board members will send their comments on the new application forms and forward them to the committee.

Mr. Houston stated since there are members of the public at the meeting, the purpose is to streamline the application and make it easier for the public to understand.

NEW BUSINESS

None

The next scheduled Planning Board Meeting will be on October 20, 2025.

ADJOURMENT

There being no further business, Mayor Karr moved that the meeting be adjourned, seconded by Mrs. McCluskey. Voice vote. All in favor.

Motion carried.

Karen M. Coffey
Board Secretary

Susan Collopy
Recording Secretary