

**Pocono Township Board of Commissioners  
Reorganization Meeting Minutes  
January 5, 2026 | 6:00 p.m.**

The Reorganization meeting of the Pocono Township Board of Commissioners was held on January 5, 2026 and was opened by Solicitor Leo DeVito at 6:26 p.m. followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

**Roll Call:** Ellen Gndt, present; Natasha Leap, present; Mike Velardi, present; Matt Long, present, Charles Keppler, present.

**In Attendance:** Leo DeVito-Township Solicitor; Jon Tresslar- Engineer; Patrick Briegel-Public Works Director; Jerrod Belvin-Township Manager; James Wagner, Chief of Police; Erica Tomas-Administrative Assistant, Paul Morgan, SFM Consulting.

**Election of a President – Township Solicitor**

Charles Keppler made a motion, seconded by Matt Long, to nominate Ellen Gndt as president of the Board of Commissioners. Roll Call: Ellen Gndt, aye; Natasha Leap, nay; Mike Velardi, nay; Matt Long, aye; Charles Keppler, aye. Motion carries 3-2.

Ellen Gndt read a statement with regard to the past year being a little challenging with a lot of changes. The elections and transitions have tested everyone and reminds us of how much professionalism, fairness and transparency are important in local government. The board will operate openly making decisions guided by policy and public interest and treat every resident with respect. The board shares one responsibility, to serve our community faithfully while turning the page, moving forward together with integrity, accountability and focus on what matters most, the township, and most importantly, you as residents.

Ellen Gndt nominated Matt Long and Mike Velardi nominated Natasha Leap. Natasha Leap declined the nomination.

Ellen Gndt made a motion, seconded by Charles Keppler, to nominate Matt Long as vice president of the Board of Commissioners. Roll Call: Ellen Gndt, aye; Natasha Leap, nay; Mike Velardi, nay; Matt Long, aye; Charles Keppler, aye. Motion carries 3-2.

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

Dawn Eilber (Resident) – Congratulated Ellen. Dawn addressed the board regarding permits given out on the Superfund Site to shoot off pyrotechnics shows. They are vibrating homes which draw concern of what is happening underground. Zoning will look into this matter as there haven't been any permits issued for this site. Jerrod Belvin recommended Dawn call the non-emergency number should it happen again.

Pete Bagley (Smithfield Township)- Chairman of the Monroe County Republican Party – expressed strong support for Jerrod Belvin as Township Manager, stating that he was initially skeptical but now believes that Jerrod has done an impressive job. He highlighted Jerrod's ability to manage a dynamic township, navigate the political process, and serve both the residents and businesses effectively. Mr. Bagley encouraged the board to retain Jerrod Belvin, emphasizing that talented managers are hard to find.

Chris Grape-Garvey (Resident) – expressed her strong support for Jerrod Belvin, praising his dedication to, community engagement, and effectiveness as township manager. She emphasized that Jerrod is knowledgeable, passionate, and helpful to both residents and businesses, and also highlighted his positive collaboration with the school board.

State Representative Maureen Madden- congratulated the board. She stated that she is standing in support of Jerrod Belvin to continue as Township Manager. She expressed that he is incredibly great to work with, responsive and his deep understanding of government, effectiveness in securing grants and saving township money, along with his ability to work across partisan lines, dedication, and significant positive impact on the township should be recognized and retained for the good of the community.

Jim Pellegrini (Resident) – expressed his strong support for retaining Jerrod Belvin as Township Manager, noting his accessibility, quick responses, and significant contributions to the township’s success and financial savings. Mr. Napp stated that he is floored the Jerrod’s reappointment is even in question and affirmed his dedication and value to the community.

Frank Greeley (Resident) – congratulated everyone. He also expressed his support for Jerrod Belvin after working with him directly. He stated that Jerrod is responsive and gets answers. He also voiced his support for Jim Wagner and Pat Briegel.

Josh Knapp (Resident) – congratulations to Ellen, Charles, and Matt on with regard to getting elected and hopes for good things to come for Pocono Township.

Terry VanBritsom Martin (Chestnuthill Township) congratulated everyone on the board. She emphasized Jerrod Belvins’ devotion to the township and that he should be able to continue within his role as township manager.

An executive session was held prior to this meeting regarding personnel and litigation.

Mike Velardi made a motion, seconded by Charles Keppler, to set the Board of Commissioners’ meetings for the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Monday of each month at 6:00 p.m. If a regularly scheduled meeting falls on a holiday, the meeting will be held the next day on Tuesday. All in favor. Motion carried.

Ellen Gndt made a motion, seconded by Matt Long, to appoint Charles Keppler as a Parliamentarian for the Board of Commissioners. Josh Knapp stated that he hopes that this year is a lot more restrained in what the commissioners do from the bench, in terms of talking with the public and each other. All in favor. Motion carried.

Mike Velardi made a motion, seconded by Natasha Leap, to appoint the firm of Broughal & DeVito as Pocono Township Solicitor for township, sewer business, labor issues, and planning at \$165/hr. All in favor. Motion carried.

Ellen Gndt made a motion, seconded by Natasha Leap, to appoint T&M Engineering as the Pocono Township Engineer. All in favor. Motion carried.

Ellen Gndt questioned the need to retain the current township treasurer, noting that Gina Zuvich, as fiscal administrator, already performs key treasurer duties like budget management and bookkeeping. The suggestion was made to appoint Regina Zuvich as treasurer, pending discussion with her about accepting the position and determining appropriate compensation.

Ellen Gndt made a motion, seconded by Matt Long, to appoint Regina Zuvich as Pocono Township Treasurer pending her acceptance and the extra stipend be determined at a future meeting. Charles Keppler stated that he feels there is some value to have another set of eyes from a financial accounting standpoint in the form of a third party. Ellen affirmed that the township does get audited by outside firms. Natasha doesn’t feel comfortable making the motion without discussion with Regina first. Natasha Leap made a motion, seconded by Mike Velardi, to table the Treasurer position. All in favor. Motion carried.

Natasha Leap made a motion, seconded by Mike Velardi, to reappoint Jim Maloney to the Civil Service Commission for a 6-year term. Charles Keppler stated that he has never met Mr. Maloney and is not familiar with his qualifications. He feels that anyone being appointed or re-appointed should be at this meeting in person to interview for the job. Matt Long asked if Charles Keppler was saying he wanted to post it and tell them to apply. Charles stated yes, he feels that most of the appointments should be opened up to the public, to people who “show an interest” in order to get a diverse pool of applicants. “That the way we are going to STAFF the Township with the best people in my opinion.” “I don’t think just keeping someone on because they’ve been on when they’re not even showing up for their appointment again, I don’t think that that’s the best path forward for the township, in my opinion.” “And that goes for ALL the appointments here. Natasha Leap stated that the appointments for the Civil Service Commission were discussed for two meetings prior to the gentleman coming in and applying and then being appointed. In addition, they came with approval from the Chief like everything is done. Jerrod Belvin

explained the role of the Civil Service Commission. Charles Keppler again stated that he would like all re-appointments be put out to the public. Maureen Madden asked if they are paid positions or volunteer. Jerrod Belvin stated volunteer. Maureen Madden stated that Mr. Maloney has been doing this volunteer job for 6 years and has expressed his desire to continue in the same capacity. She stated that should account for something. Ms. Madden recommended the township should stick with good people who care about their jobs. Chief Wagner stated that it is a VOLUNTEER position and is exceedingly difficult to get people to give of their time freely with the dedication they have shown. Monica Gerrity stated that we need to move forward as a government. She confirmed that she remembers seeing advertisements for volunteers and nobody comes forward. She suggested to Mr. Keppler that he should have been at the Civil Service to meet Mr. Maloney. If people are interested in the future, they need to step up to be considered for the next time there is an opening. Mr. Keppler once again stated his opinion on this matter. Mike Velardi stated that prior practice was to re-appoint the volunteers who have committed their time and done a good job for the township. They should not have to come forward and beg to do a FREE job. Jim Pellegrini asked what the impact would be. Ellen Gmandt explained that impact. Charles Keppler continued to state his opinion. Roll call: Ellen Gmandt, aye; Natasha Leap, aye, Mike Velardi, aye, Matt Long, aye; Charles Keppler, nay. Motion carried 4-1.

Matt Long asked about the Zoning Hearing Board seat that has expired. Jerrod Belvin stated that Lew Ginsberg is still interested in continuing to serve on the ZHB. Natasha Leap made a motion, seconded by Mike Velardi to appoint Lew Ginsberg to the Zoning Hearing Board. Charles Keppler stated, "would you care to ask if there's anyone in the audience who would like to consider serving in this position?" He asked what it entails. Leo DeVito stated that they typically meet at 5 pm once a month depending on the number of hearings are scheduled. Matt Long made a motion, seconded by Charles Keppler to table the Zoning Hearing Board appointment. Roll Call: Ellen Gmandt, aye; Natasha Leap, nay; Mike Velardi, nay; Matt Long, aye; Charles Keppler, aye. Motion carries 3-2.

Matt Long made a motion, seconded by Charles Keppler, to post the vacancy for the zoning hearing board on social media. Natasha Leap clarified that it's not a vacancy where the board is choosing not to reappoint a man who has served in on this board for over 10 years, has been impartial and neutral in his decisions and not that he resigned. Gina Loyak stated, "If I'm volunteering for these positions that you guys are talking about, and I've given 10 years, six years, to you and I've done a great job, and just that this has come up for discussion, I'm out. I'm not going to do it anymore." Matt Long stated his concerns about the individual and that he is grateful for his service. Charles Keppler stated that there's an impression that there's a lot of inside game that goes on here in Pocono Township, where it's the same people who have been running things for an exceptionally long time. Gary Gallery clarified that the open seat is an Alternate one. Terry VanBritsom from Chestnuthill Township stated that she agrees with Charles Keppler. Roll call: Ellen Gmandt, aye; Natasha Leap, nay; Mike Velardi, nay; Matt Long, aye; Charles Keppler, aye.

Leo DeVito explained the roll of a Vacancy Chair as in the event a commissioner steps down, resigns or no longer can serve, the current existing board has 30 days to make an appointment. If they cannot by majority, then the vacancy chair is called in and this person will act as Chairman if the seat is not filled within 15 days for some reason, it will then go to court. Matt Long made a motion, seconded by Ellen Gmandt, to appoint Jerry Lastowski to the position of Chair to the Vacancy Board. Natasha Leap & Mike Velardi asked if either party were in attendance to express if they do or don't want the seat. Has Tom stated that after 12 years he no longer wants it? Maureen Madden stated we're not really posting these positions, are we? We're just kind of putting other people in instead that some people know and some people don't. Not sure how this action is rectifying the idea of people being in there too long. She stated that some people are there for a long time because they are doing a good job and to remove them doesn't seem fair. Natasha Leap stated that they should open it for people to apply just like for all of the other positions. That would be the fair and transparent way. Maureen Madden asked about rules and if you need to live in Pocono Township to comment about the meetings. Matt Long stated that the chair has only been used once by the township and feels Mr. Lastowski would be a perfect person for the position. Natasha Leap stated "he very well may be, but you're letting everyone else apply for there positions, and you're opening their positions. Dawn Eilber said she thinks Jerry would do a great job. Josh Knapp stated

he thinks there's value to people who are familiar with their jobs and are showing up and doing the job. He also thinks there's something to the public facing side, where you advertise these positions available. Roll call: Ellen Gndt, aye; Natasha Leap, nay; Mike Velardi, nay; Matt Long, aye; Charles Keppler, nay. Motion fails 2-3.

Mike Velardi had started to make a motion to re-appoint Tom Falver. Natasha Leap stated that the board should open this just like the rest. "It's the only fair and transparent way to do it." Matt Long stated that he didn't understand why when he is suggesting a former commissioner beloved by everyone. Natasha Leap stated that he wants to post the other positions of volunteers who have dedicated their time to replace them. Charles Keppler made a motion, seconded by Natasha Leap, to open the position for the Pocono Township Vacancy Board, with a term to expire December 31, 2026. Maureen Madden asked if the township has always posted these positions. Is the township starting a new policy during the meeting? It doesn't seem fair to her. Josh Knapp stated if he feels that maybe this should be considered for the next reorganization two years from now vs what is being done now feels unadvised. Frank Greely paid positions are a bit different than the volunteer positions. If volunteers aren't showing up when they should the position should be posted accordingly. Roll call: Ellen Gndt, nay; Natasha Leap, aye; Mike Velardi, aye; Matt Long, nay; Charles Keppler, aye. Motion carries 3-2.

Mike Velardi made a motion, seconded by Natasha Leap, to appoint Jerrod Belvin the PMCOG Representative. Roll call: Ellen Gndt, aye, Natasha Leap, aye, Mike Velardi, aye; Matt Long, aye; Charles Keppler, nay. Motion carried 4-1

Natasha Leap made a motion, seconded by Mike Velardi, to appoint James Wagner as Pocono Township Chief of Police for a term to expire on the date of the next board meeting following its reorganization meeting in January 2027. All in favor. Motion carried.

Ellen Gndt stated, she believes that Pat Briegels job with the township is not an appointment other than update his contract.

Natasha Leap made a motion, seconded by Mike Velardi, to appoint Jerrod Belvin as township manager for a term to expire on the date of the next board meeting following its reorganization meeting in January 2027. Ellen Gndt stated she would like to appoint Jerrod but would like to give him a performance review for 90 days to give a chance to understand his job and move on from there. Mike Velardi reminded Ellen Gndt that when they hired James Wagner, she said three months wasn't long enough and the board gave him six. Mike Velardi stated he feels Jerrod should be afforded the same courtesy. Matt Long questioned Leo DeVito about it being an "at will" position. Leo DeVito stated any position is at will. Maureen Madden questioned Jerrod Belvin how long he has been doing his job. He stated a year and a half. If he is doing a stellar job why would you even thing of replacing him? Listen to them. Matt Long stated the board would evaluate his position. Charles Keppler stated he also would rather do a formal evaluation of the township manager. Natasha Leap stated that then it should be done for every manager across the board. Gina Loyak stated that Jerrod Belvin has been a wealth of knowledge and information while working with him in comparison to every other township she has worked with. Vincent Trepasso feels he represents most all of the businessmen in the community when he states that Jerrod Belvin has been such an asset of communication between commissioners and the businessmen, and people of the community. By virtue of having a leading Democrat endorse him, that has to say a lot to everyone listening. He doesn't know why he needs any kind of probation, because he's been on probation for a year and a half and done a wonderful job. Jim Pellegrini stated to reappoint him and keep the meeting flowing. Chris Barrett stated that he has worked with Jerrod on a number of projects and would like to speak on his behalf. He's been incredible to work with. Mr. Barrett stated that he worked for the school board for 20 years and knows that Mr. Belvin has served the township incredibly well with an extraordinarily strong reputation. Josh Knapp stated he was one that was upset with how Jerrod got his position, but stated he seems to know what he's doing. Roll call: Ellen Gndt, aye; Natasha Leap, aye; Mike Velardi, aye; Matt Long, aye; Charles Keppler, nay. Motion carried. 4-1

Matt Long made a motion, seconded by Ellen Gndt, to approve the following as the approved the following depositories, ESSA, First Keystone Community Bank, First Northern Bank and Trust, PLIGIT, Citizens Bank and Wayne Bank. All in favor. Motion carried.

Matt Long made a motion, seconded by Ellen Gndt, to approve the following signatories and put them onto the bank accounts. Matt Long, Charles Keppler, Ellen Gndt, Natasha Leap, Mike Velardi, Jerrod Belvin, Regina Zuvich. All in favor. Motion carried.

Ellen Gndt made a motion, seconded by Natasha Leap, to appoint Burkheimer as our tax collector for EIT and LST tax collector. All in favor. Motion carried.

Ellen Gndt made a motion, seconded by Mike Velardi, to set the mileage reimbursement rate at the IRS rate for 2026 which is 72 and a half cents per mile. All in favor. Motion carried.

Charles Keppler made a motion, seconded by Natasha Leap, to appoint SFM Consulting as the Pocono Township Zoning Office Service. All in favor. Motion carried.

Ellen Gndt made a motion, seconded by Mike Velardi to appoint SFM Consulting to provide commercial building code services at a rate of 70% of the building permit fees. All in favor. Motion carried.

Ellen Gndt made a motion, seconded by Mike Velardi to appoint SFM Consulting to provide residential building code services at a rate of 70% of building permit fees. All in favor. Motion carried.

Ellen Gndt made a motion, seconded by Natasha Leap, to appoint Helen Beers as Pocono Township Sewage Enforcement Officer. All in favor. Motion carried.

Natasha Leap made a motion, seconded by Mike Velardi, to appoint Jerrod Belvin as Pocono Township Secretary. Matt Long asked what it entails. Jerrod stated it's who certifies and bonds the minutes for the meetings, Jerrod stated that he and Krisann work together on minutes. Charles Keppler stated his discord with the minutes provided by the township. Ellen Gndt asked for an overview of what has to be in the minutes. What is mandatory is any official action by the board. (Motion and Vote). The rest is at the discretion of the board. Roll call: Ellen Gndt, aye; Natasha Leap, aye; Mike Velardi, aye; Matt Long, aye; Charles Keppler, nay. Motion carried.

Natasha Leap made a motion, seconded by Matt Long, to appoint Krisann MacDougall as Pocono Township Assistant Secretary. Roll call: Ellen Gndt, aye; Natasha leap, aye; Mike Velardi, aye; Matt Long, aye; Charles Keppler, nay. Motion carried.

Natasha Leap made a motion, seconded by Mike Velardi, to appoint Todd Whitezman as solicitor to the Pocono Township Zoning Hearing Board. All in favor. Motion carried.

Ellen Gndt made a motion, seconded by Mike Velardi, to appoint Krisann MacDougall as zoning hearing board secretary. Roll call: Ellen Gndt, aye; Natasha Leap, aye; Mike Velardi, aye; Matt Long, aye; Charles Keppler, nay. Motion carried.

Ellen Gndt made a motion, seconded by Mike Velardi to appoint Krisann MacDougall as recording secretary for the board of commissioners and planning commission. Roll call: Ellen Gndt, aye; Natasha Leap, aye; Mike Velardi, aye; Matt Long, aye; Charles Keppler, nay. Motion carried.

Mike Velardi made a motion, seconded by Natasha Leap, to appoint Jerrod Belvin as the Open Records Officer. Charles Keppler stated that he made a number of Open Records requests in the past year and felt it was difficult to get them in a timely manner. Matt Long asked if it was typical for a manager to be the Open Records Officer as well. Leo DeVito stated yes. The township receives an excessive number of requests, on average 260 in 2025. Ellen Gndt stated that we are to respond within 5 business days. Jerrod Belvin explained that the 30-day extension was enacted with Mr. Keppler due to policy of certification of audio at the following board meeting. Roll call: Ellen Gndt, aye; Natasha Leap, aye; Mike Velardi, aye; Matt Long, aye; Charles Keppler, nay. Motion carried 4-1.

Matt Long made a motion, seconded by Mike Velardi, to appoint Krisann MacDougall as the Alternate Open Records Officer. Roll call: Ellen Gndt, aye; Natasha Leap, aye; Mike Velardi, aye; Matt Long, aye; Charles Keppler, nay. Motion carried 4-1.

Mike Velardi made a motion, seconded by Natasha Leap, to appoint Jerrod Belvin as representative to Monroe County Tax committee with a term to expire December 31, 2026. Ellen Gndt asked if it would be a better fit for Mary Reiley, Tax Collector. Jerrod Belvin said he would ask her if she were interested in the position. Matt Long made a motion, seconded by Mike Velardi, to table the motion. All in favor. Motion carried.

Matt Long made a motion, seconded by Natasha Leap, to appoint Jerrod Belvin as the township Emergency Management Coordinator. All in favor. Motion carried.

Mike Velardi made a motion, seconded by Natasha Leap, to appoint Samantha Rispoli as assistant township Emergency Management Coordinator. All in favor. Motion carried.

Matt Long made a motion, seconded by Natasha Leap, to appoint the Pocono Township Volunteer Fire Department members as 2026 Fire Police as requested by Chief Jordan Merring. All in favor. Motion carried.

### **Public Comment**

Claire Learn congratulated Jerrod and everyone else on the panel. She described the struggling condition of three local cemeteries after church closures and limited funds. They requested township assistance and community volunteers for cleanup and maintenance, emphasizing the cemeteries' visibility and importance to the township's image. She shared contact information for those willing to help.

**Adjournment** – Mike Velardi made a motion, seconded by Ellen Gndt, to adjourn the meeting 8:19 p.m. All in favor. Motion carried.