

**BENSALEM TOWNSHIP COUNCIL
MEETING MINUTES**

**Monday
December 1st, 2025
2026 Budget Meeting**

COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT:

Joseph Knowles, Council President
Edward Kisselback, Council Vice President
Michelle Benitez, Council Secretary
Stacey Champion, Council Member

SUPPORTING STAFF PRESENT:

Mayor Joseph DiGirolamo
John Chaykowski, Director of Administration
Debora McBreen, Council Clerk/Recording Secretary
Joseph Pizzo, Township Solicitor
Mark Antozzeski, Fire Chief
Jim Bogan, Director of Operations, Bensalem Township Country Club
Ken Farrall, Director of Building & Planning
William McVey, Director of Public Safety
Kyle Pennypacker, Director of Parks & Rec
Tim Shultz, Director of Public Works

PLEASE NOTE:

The minutes are not verbatim but rather a synopsis of what transpired during the meeting, and while I do my best to attribute remarks and questions to the correct individual, there may be mistakes or omissions because of the “back and forth” dialogue and the lack of the use of their microphone.

1. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:

Council President Knowles opened the meeting with a moment of silence and/or prayer which was followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. REVIEW AND CONSIDERATION OF THE PROPOSED 2026 BUDGET:

Council President Knowles invited the **Mayor** to make the Opening Remarks. The Mayor indicated he would like his message regarding the 2026 Budget to be written into the record.

BUILDING AND PLANNING:

Director Chaykowski introduced the Director of Building and Planning, Mr. Ken Farrall. Director Farrall indicated that his budget as presented is pretty much the same as the last few years and would answer any questions that Council had.

Council Vice President Kisselback questioned the Office Supplies line item.

Director Farrall indicated that it was just a function of things going up in cost.

Director Chaykowski indicated for budget to budget it is going up \$1,000 from 2025 to 2026. The projected for the end of the year is approximately \$6,000. The cost could vary from year to year as far as how many mailings and things of that sort.

Council President Knowles asked if the increase of salaries were per the contract and not the hiring of new employees?

Director Farrall indicated that to be correct and there are no new hires.

Councilwoman Champion indicated that as a function of the environment health insurance is going up significantly across the board.

Director Chaykowski indicated that the Township is looking at approximately 7½% to 9% increase estimate. They have not received firm numbers to date.

BENSALEM TOWNSHIP COUNTRY CLUB/BANQUET FACILITIES:

Director Chaykowski introduced the Director of Golf Operations, Mr. Jim Bogan. Director Chaykowski indicated that the Township has been renovating the existing mansion on the golf course and that project is coming to a close. Late December early January the project should be completed and open in the Spring. The farmhouse is the new restaurant that will be open to the public. Director Bogan's budget has a brand-new section labeled farmhouse which consists of the Operating expenses and Salaries for that particular business. Working with the current Banquet Manager and Director Bogan and the current Executive Chef, the Township has developed a budget.

Council Vice President Kisselback asked Director Bogan how many rounds of golf does the golf course bring in each year.

Director Bogan indicated that the golf course averages anywhere from 42,000 to 45,000. The golf course came up a little short this year due to the weather and construction, it was a tough year for golf courses. Next year is going to be a good year. The catering department has done extremely well.

Council Vice President Kisselback asked conceivably, what would the maximum amount of rounds the golf course could possibly have?

Director Bogan indicated that a golf course could get up to 60,000 rounds of golf. Years ago the golf course did 60,000 rounds of golf, when it was just a golf course.

Councilwoman Champion asked if the golf course was seeing an uptick in younger generations taking more of an interest?

Director Bogan indicated with the advent of COVID it was a tremendous boom for golf and has sort of settled off now. There is a lot of young and middle-aged people getting back into the game. The growth of golf is extremely good.

Councilwoman Champion asked what is the age to join the association?

Director Bogan indicated that you could be a “junior” which is of the age of twelve years old to be in the association.

Council President Knowles indicated that the banquet facility people that are handling the golf outings, weddings and funeral lunches are doing a very good job; and asked if that whole staff is going to handle the farmhouse?

Director Chaykowski indicated that the anticipation would be the current Banquet Manager and the Assistant Banquet Manager would handle the farmhouse, as far as overseeing the overall management of it. But, the Township will be hiring additional staff just for the farmhouse.

Council Vice President Kisselback asked for the scheduled opening date?

Director Chaykowski indicated early Spring. There hasn't been an official opening date, but sometime in early Spring.

Director Bogan indicated that he would have a soft opening and it was going to be a tremendous addition to the country club. The comments from people coming in who didn't even know that building was there years ago. Since the catering hall and the bar have been done, it has been drawing in a lot of business.

Director Chaykowski indicated that all of the renovations, as well as the drainage, the hole realignment, and also there will be a few more projects on the golf course in 2026; they were all done through a Redevelopment Capital Improvement Assistance Program Grant through the State, that Governor Shapiro was able to allow a reallocation. The Township was able to do all of these projects through Grant funding.

Director Bogan indicated the golf course has a very high attendance from veterans, especially Wounded Warriors.

PARKS AND RECREATION:

Director Chaykowski introduced the Director of Parks and Rec, Mr. Kyle Pennypacker. There are a couple of Grants that were reallocated back into 2026. In 2025 the Township had applied for two Grant Programs to assist with Parks and Rec. One was adding additional field lighting and replacement of field lighting at Yezzi Ramblers Field, as well as the submission of a Grant to renovate the Community Park playground area. Both of those Grants were due to the State

shutdown this year, the funding was not awarded yet. The Township is anticipating one of them being awarded in December. If the Township is awarded these Grants, they will move into 2026. If the Grants are not awarded the Township will re-evaluate the areas.

Council President Knowles asked Director Pennypacker when Imaginationland will re-open?

Director Pennypacker indicated that Imaginationland was in the final stages. They just finished the rubber surfacing last week. They still have concrete work to do, some more accessible things to do to make sure that the property is good to go, finalizing details. They are looking for an opening maybe the end of this year, beginning of next year. Landscaping and grass will not happen until Spring. They are hoping to open up intermittently and at least have the playground equipment accessible for the kids.

Council Vice President Kisselback questioned the third item, Real Estate Tax Refunds.

Director Chaykowski indicated that would be if any businesses or homeowners seek an assessment reduction through County and they are awarded a County reduction, the Parks and Rec Fund receives a portion of the Township Real Estate Taxes. The refund due to that particular individual would be allocated throughout everyone who receives Real Estate Taxes.

Director Pennypacker indicated that besides the Grant Projects they are looking at, they are also looking to put in two more Pickleball Courts at Central Park, which will give some relief for the existing courts at Mill Creek.

They have been doing a lot of work at Growden Mansion testing of the wood to get a date and learning about where the buildings came from, what their purposes were. They just had dendrochronology testing done from an expert from Oxford, England, which is one of their ongoing projects.

It's been a rough year for vandalism and one of the other projects they have been working on is security camera systems, and getting access to the Township Police so that they can keep an eye on these properties.

Council Vice President Kisselback indicated that Director Pennypacker was doing an excellent job with the active recreation for the Township children.

Council President Knowles indicated that it looked like the playground was full for the Summer Program at Richlieu Road.

Director Pennypacker indicated that they did not turn anyone down, they were a little bit over the maximum but met the ratios for their counselors and kids.

Council President Knowles asked about the soccer fields.

Director Pennypacker indicated they were working on some minor details. They are working on the property. The turf field and the upper fields are all opening and are bringing in good revenue.

Director Pennypacker indicated that the fields are not dedicated to any one group, it is open to all. The Parks and Rec Department has started an online registration process. Anybody can go

online, request a date, go through the approval process, present their certificate of insurance, request the time and date and the Parks and Rec Department will check on the availability.

Council Secretary Benitez asked about the million-dollar Grant for Open Space that came in 2025.

Director Chaykowski indicated that was the Grant received from State Representative K.C. Tomlinson. Currently the Township has sent an offer letter to the Archdiocese to purchase the ground at Gibson and Bensalem Boulevard, which is the intended use, should the Archdiocese accept the Township's offer.

POLICE AND FIRE:

Director Chaykowski introduced the Director of Public Safety, Mr. William McVey.

Director McVey requested to make a few remarks before taking Council's questions regarding the 2026 Budget.

It is important for the public to know that the police are the largest aspect of the Township Budget. But, the Police Officers are doing a fantastic job. The information was put out publicly, on line this year. Serious crime is down 13% since 2022. A particular note, robberies and burglaries are down over 50% and they are trending the same way in 2025. These are great trends and they want to continue in that direction.

Director McVey introduced the people present from his department and they were, Lieutenant Schum who helps prepare the Budget throughout the year. Lieutenant Bugsch and members of the PBA Leadership. They have a great working relationship with them as a Command Staff which helps the Police Department attract the best applicants to Bensalem Township as Police Officers. This is something that they want to continue to do and work together as a team with their Union. In addition to their people, it is very important that Council and the public understand the increases in technology that they put into play in the past five years.

They now have over 60 intersection cameras, over 50 license plate readers strategically placed throughout the Township. Every police vehicle is equipped with a license plate reader. They have in-car cameras, body-cams. Everything the officer is doing is recorded to protect the officer, to protect the public. It has been a tremendous program that the police department is building upon. That is why there is an increase in technology this year because the body cameras that are worn by the officers, in particular.

Director McVey indicated that he recently did a demonstration of the body cameras for the Mayor. These cameras can translate over 40 languages in real time for an officer on the street. Bensalem is a very diverse community, especially the transient population on Route 1. It really keeps the officer safe. It also has a new feature, the older members of the department have not come accustomed to it yet, which is understandable; it writes the police report. It watches the body camera and in real time it will transcribe what occurred saving the officer valuable time, and keeping the officer safer. The officer's head is not buried in a computer in their car.

These are some of the new technologies that the police department has enhanced in 2026. The police department currently has 13 drones that are deployed throughout the Township and police

vehicles for emergencies. The Drone First Responder Program is a new technology where they would have two fixed locations that an officer can deploy a drone from their desk in real time as a crime is occurring. Some spots in this Township may take an officer five to seven minutes to respond in an emergency, which is too long for eyes to get there.

The police department did a demonstration for the pilot program where they were getting drones to a scene within a minute. Capturing the crime in progress giving the department eyes overhead, getting the license plate, suspect description and really keeping the officer safe to record that transaction of what they are dealing with.

These are some of the things that the police department is building upon. The police departed received reaccreditation through CALEA which is international accreditation. This past year Director McVey and Lieutenant Bugsch had to travel to California to receive that accreditation after a rigorous four-year evaluation and then finalizing that coming to the Township to evaluate the Bensalem Police Department independently. The police department received that and it will carry for the next four years. That just shows the police department's commitment to excellence in policing, their transparency to the community and their willingness to have outsiders come to the Township to evaluate them independently. The Bensalem Police Department is the only one in Bucks County that has that certification. They also have the PLEA Act State certification and are one of 17 police departments, out of approximately 1,100 or 1,200 in the State of Pennsylvania to have that.

It demonstrates the leadership that all of the men and women do every day and thinks it is something that the Township should take great pride in, which is displayed in various spots so that the community knows that they have a professional police department.

Director McVey thanked Council, the Mayor and Administration because they have unwavering support for not only the police department, but the first responders, fire department, which is equally as important, and the emergency services.

Council President Knowles indicated that between the police and fire it's almost 65% to 70% of the Township's Budget that is Public Safety and the people need to realize that these entities are required to have the best training. They make split second decisions that are sometimes life and death. This also has to do with the leadership of the Public Safety Department.

Director McVey indicated that they had two critical incidents this year, life and death situations, and the officers performed admirably which was a direct result of the training that's been instituted in the Bensalem Police Department for years.

Council Secretary Benitez commented that Council was so proud to work with the Public Safety department. The community policing aspect of it, many of the officers wear many hats and serve in other capacities to work arm-in-arm with our community members. The accreditations that the Bensalem Police Department has year over year is remarkable. This is the third time that the Bensalem Police Department has received the CALEA, which is a span of 12 years consistently. The Bensalem Police Department has been effectively gaining that recognition.

Director McVey thanked the Councilwoman and indicated that the Bensalem PAL Program has over a thousand kids and the community supports them there, but more importantly, we are one

of the few communities that Bensalem Township loves their Police Officers. This really helps the Police Officers do their job.

Regarding the Philadelphia border, the police department has had a 450% increase in people taking off from the Police Officers. The Officers have to engage in a pursuit potentially so dangerous, there is a mindset out there that people don't obey the law. The police department is pushing crime down but there is still a lot of crazy that comes into Bensalem that the police department has to make sure they recognize that and what the officers face every day.

Councilwoman Champion agreed with Councilwoman Benitez and the most important thing is the interaction the Police Officers have with the schools. The amount of concern and dedication that the Police Officers show to every student who goes to school in Bensalem, whether they are from Bensalem or not, just shows the importance of how much the Police Officers care about the people who visit Bensalem, who live in Bensalem and who work in Bensalem.

Council Vice President Kisselback asked Director McVey how many Lieutenants are in the department?

Director McVey indicated that there are six Lieutenants.

Council Vice President Kisselback indicated that the Township has budgeted for a Captain which the Township has not had for a number of years and asked the Director to explain the need for a Captain.

Director McVey indicated that they are doing a restructuring of the Command Staff. With the growth of the Police department, the volume of incidents they are handling as a Police department, instituting a Captain as the clear number three in the chain of command is a necessity at this point. There are six Lieutenants that work well together in their leadership executive roles, but for times that the Director may not be available or the Deputy Director, it's a clear delineation of command for that Captain. They will not be replacing the Lieutenant's positions. The Command Staff will remain at eight. The Director's position, the Deputy Director, and if approved, it will be five Lieutenants and one Captain that will be above the Lieutenant position between the Deputy and Lieutenant.

It will remain the eight in total but give them more span of control and will be more reflective of trends across the County where that position has seemed to have gone away over the time of Director McVey's time as a Police Officer, but now is re-emerging. When they do details, as they do many times and lead them it will be better to have a Captain representing that and leading that, especially when they're commanding others from other Police departments. It is a much-needed improvement in their structure.

Council Vice President Kisselback asked when is the position of Captain taking place.

Director McVey indicated, if approved, he would propose it be with the Mayor, early January.

Councilwoman Champion indicated that the budget, in terms of all the staff, is inclusive of the hires not yet made.

Director McVey indicated the total allocation. Excluding himself, of 107 sworn Police Officers. They added no additional allocation of manpower.

Council Vice President Kisselback asked if the budget reflects five Lieutenants and one Captain?

Director McVey indicated that was correct.

Council President Knowles asked Director McVey if they were in the process of interviewing for Police Officers? If so, are they replacing officers that are retiring or are they new positions?

Director McVey indicated that his Deputies have him trapped in interviews the last three days of potential candidates. They started with 300 applicants, which is a great number and are very proud of that number of applicants. They have narrowed that list to 48 that will interview with the Director and Deputy Director. They are three-quarters of the way through that process and have found some of the candidates to be remarkable with their military service, prior Police College, a very diverse background of candidates. They will replace those who have retired this past year and with the DROP are able to obviously anticipate when others are going to retire. The Police department is anticipating potentially ten over the next two years to replace those who have retired.

Councilwoman Champion asked about Computer Tech Support and Equipment.

Director Chaykowski indicated that was what Director McVey was referring to with the additions in the body cameras with the translation, as well as the AI (Artificial Intelligence) capability. That is an increase in the annual cost for the Maintenance Agreement that the Township has with Axon. In 2025 the Township switched from Kodi Daxon, fully integrated from one Records Management System to a new one which the Township is now housed under one umbrella.

Director McVey indicated that there was a cost of that conversion of 25 years of record management. You have to take every police report, every name and it has to be converted over to the new system. The Police department is now under one umbrella of technology, which the Police department has been trying to do for quite some time. This was an additional cost as well as the enhancements they are doing to the technology.

Director McVey indicated that he would like to compliment Chief, Ron Harris and the Vice President, Tom Markert for their work as the Volunteer Organization working with the Township Chief collaboratively, to prepare the Township for the future and have done a remarkable job.

FIRE COMPANY:

Chief Antozzeski indicated that he started with Bensalem on February 24th, 2024. He has been working well with Mr. Ron Harris and all of his officers, they meet at least monthly. Mr. Harris and the Chief are working on master planning now for operations as they go into 2026.

There has been a lot of growth with the Volunteer Fire Company. Their organization has restructured again regarding use of their buildings, their personnel, a lot of things have changed. They are working very well together with the career staff and volunteers. They are doing

combination crews when they need to. They have paid personnel and volunteers riding the apparatus together.

Their goal is to keep two apparatus and service 24/7. They are doing this during the weekdays with a career crew and a volunteer crew. Occasionally they don't have enough personnel so they give them one of the paid staff. Now they have two apparatus and service, and that increases their productivity across the Township safety for their personnel, etc. They are exchanging equipment back and forth when they have equipment needs, things of that nature. The capabilities have increased us working together and should continue in the future.

Council President Knowles asked about the salaries and if there are 11 full-time fire people.

Chief Antozzeski indicated that they had just received a Grant and was approved for them to move forward. They are in the hiring process right now doing interviews. Once the new staff comes on board, there will be 12 personnel including the Chief. The Battalion Chief, Lieutenant and the rest of the firefighter EMT's, that will put them at 12 personnel, and continue with one part-timer. That individual helps them fill in different shifts a couple three days a week depending on his other schedule. It works out well for the department and it helps fill those gaps.

The other items that may have gone up in the grant was all associated with the new staff, such as new turnout gear, new uniforms, things of that nature. Some of the line items did go up, but it is all associated with the four new hires.

PUBLIC WORKS AND LIQUID FUELS:

Director Chaykowski introduced the Director of Public Works, Mr. Tim Schultz.

Director Schultz started off with the most important question, and yes, the Township has plenty of salt.

Director Chaykowski indicated that the Township added a \$300,000 snow removal line in the General Fund portion of Public Works. The State Highway fund is the State Liquid Fuels money with \$850,000 budgeted there. Primarily what the Township does is use the Liquid Fuels money first. In the event if there is a drastic winter, the Township wants to make sure that there is plenty of funds available. The intention would be not to utilize the General Funds monies, it is there just in case it is needed. This comes into play when the Township has to hire a lot of outside contractors. They are obviously a lot more money but are a necessity for the courts and other roads that the Township does not have the smaller equipment needed to be able to utilize in the areas needed, as in cul-de-sacs.

Council Vice President Kisselback asked Director Schultz, in addition to himself, how many employees are in the Public Works department and will you be hiring any more for next year?

Director Schultz indicated that there are 23 full-time employees, and 1 part-timer, and no additional hires.

Council Vice President Kisselback indicated that there is an increase of \$345,000 from actual expenses from this year to next year.

Director Chaykowski indicated they have still remained in the budget and have not needed to hire a Deputy Director for the Public Works department. Mr. Schultz has been doing a great job along with the men who are assisting him. However, that position has been left open. Some of the men are new in 2024. So through step increases their salaries will go higher than a normal percentage increase into 2026.

Council Secretary Benitez asked Director Schultz if there were any major equipment needs coming up?

Director Schultz indicated that they are replacing two of their dump trucks. One is 20 years old and the other one is 24 years old. The department has tried to get the most out of those dump trucks which have already been rebuilt twice. They will be replacing their tree chipper truck as well.

Director Chaykowski indicated that Director Schultz was able to institute, when he took on the Director position, a full-time tree crew. The crew is out on a full-time basis maintaining Township trees, trimming around street lights, traffic signals if necessary. That is the reason for the replacement of the chipper truck. The one the Township currently has was built in-house.

Director Schultz indicated that a lot of the tree trimming, in previous years, was contracted out. Now, with the tree-trimming crew it is all done in-house.

Council Secretary Benitez commented that the Public Works Department was doing a great job.

Councilwoman Champion asked Director Chaykowski what is the driving factor in terms of the increase in expense?

Director Chaykowski indicated that in total budget for the General Fund is \$70 million dollars. \$5 million basically transfers out for debt payments payroll, return monies to the trust fund. It comes down to a \$65 million operating budget which includes payroll and benefits and then Operating Expenses.

The Operating Expenses, year after year, primarily stay static or they will increase slightly as the police department had to do with technology changes. Even that sometimes the Township tries and figures out where they could cut somewhere else to make up that increase. Primarily 73% of the \$65 million is obligated contractual salaries and benefits.

Council President Knowles indicated that the \$300 dollar rebate has been budgeted for 2026.

Director Chaykowski indicated that it has been presented again on the budget the \$300 with the additional \$150 for the low-income seniors and disabled individuals. With this program the Township has given out hundreds of millions of dollars back to the residents. Bensalem is the only municipality that has the casino hosting fee that actually gives any money back, even though the Township is not obligated to do so.

Council President Knowles indicated that it cost the Township \$4.5 million to do that every year.

Council Vice President Kisselback commented that in addition to everything happening, the Township still has \$46 million in the Trust Fund which they did not have to use to adjust the budget.

Council President Knowles asked if there was anyone in the audience who would like to speak for or against the Township 2026 Budget. Seeing no one come forward the Public Comment portion was closed.

Councilwoman Champion motioned to approve the 2026 Budget with no tax increase and the \$300 Rebate as presented. **Council Secretary Benitez** second and the motion carried 4-0.

The Mayor wanted to thank Council and all of the Directors for the great job that they do all year round.

Council Secretary Benitez indicated that it has been a joy and a honor to work with the Bensalem community.

The Mayor indicated that Carol McCluskey, who has done a lot of community work, has passed away. Her funeral is Thursday at Tomlinson's 10:00am. until noon. She was a great lady who did a lot of work for the Township through the years.

Vice President Kisselback indicated that it was a pleasure going over the Budget and it is a fine Budget for 2026.

Councilwoman Champion compliment's Director Chaykowski on the 2026 Budget and indicated that it was nice to see that there are no extravagant expectations on either side. The Budget was based upon historical activity and going forward as to what they expect.

Council President Knowles indicated the next Council meeting is December 8th, 2025.

3. **ADJOURNMENT:**

There being no other business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned.

The Bensalem Township Budget Council Meeting of December 1st, 2025 can be viewed in its entirety at the following websites:

www.bensalempa.gov

or

www.youtube.com

Respectfully Submitted,

Debora F. McBreen
Recording Secretary