

**BENSALEM TOWNSHIP COUNCIL  
MEETING MINUTES**

**Monday  
May 26<sup>th</sup>, 2026**

**COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT:**

Ed Tokmajian, Jr., Council President  
Jesse Sloane, Council Vice President  
Joe Wenzel, Jr., Council Secretary  
Ed Kisselback, Council Member  
Joseph Knowles, Council Member

**SUPPORTING STAFF PRESENT:**

Mayor Joseph DiGirolamo  
Ken Ferris, Solicitor  
Debora McBreen, Council Clerk/Recording Secretary  
Joseph Pizzo, Township Solicitor  
Philip Wursta, Township Engineer

**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. OPENING OF THE MEETING:**

**Council President Tokmajian** opened the meeting with a moment of silence and/or prayer, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

**2. INTRODUCTION OF COUNCIL MEMBERS, MAYOR AND STAFF:**

**Council President Tokmajian** introduced the Mayor, Council Members and Supporting Staff.

**Solicitor Pizzo** indicated that the Township Council met in an Executive Session immediately prior to this evening’s meeting for approximately 30 minutes. Present for that Executive Session Were Councilman Wenzel, Tokmajian, Kisselback and Knowles as well as the Mayor and Solicitor. Two matters of pending litigation and one matter of real estate were discussed during the Executive Session. No official action was taken during the Executive Session on any of those matters and no official action will be required this evening during this meeting as a result of that Executive Session.

## **ACKNOWLEDGING MAY AS MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS MONTH:**

**Council President Tokmajian** was pleased to acknowledge Mental Health Awareness Month which serves as an important reminder that mental health impacts individuals and families in every community. Across the country we continue to see the increased rates of anxiety, depression, stress and mental health challenges especially among young people. According to National Studies nearly one in five adults experience mental illness each year, and youth mental health concerns have risen significantly over the last decade.

The issue is somewhat personal to Council President Tokmajian and indicated that during his daughter's high school years a teammate on her soccer team had tragically taken her own life. Witnessing the impact that loss had on her teammates, friends, family and the entire sports organization, is something he will never forget.

**Council Vice President Sloane** indicated that he did not think that there is a single person in this Township that has not been touched by the effects of mental health, the struggles that our community faces. For himself, he could relate that suicide is a very real concern, particularly in the Veteran community in which he has lost friends due to suicide. He asked that everyone take a look inside and make sure that they are aware that somebody that you were talking to may be struggling with something they do not feel comfortable talking to you about; but everyone has their own struggles.

In late 2020 Bensalem was a pilot for a Co-responders Program launched by the County where there were two Social Workers partnering with our local Police Department to help assist the Police Department for some of these issues that were arising in our community.

Council Vice President Sloane invited the County Commissioner, Diane Marseglia to talk a little bit about that as well as some of her own stories.

**Commissioner Marseglia** indicated that the Co-responders Program, that is in over 30 Police Departments now in Bucks County, has really helped a lot. They have social workers right out there with police officers able to help people who are having a crisis. They have opened up the Diagnostic Assessment Restoration and Treatment Center, which is a place on the prison grounds; but this is for people who have ended up in jail, but shouldn't be there because they have a mental health problem. So now the police or the hospital can refer someone directly there and they can bypass the jail. There are many people in jail who deteriorate while they are in there and they never get the mental health help that they need. They are really not there for a crime; they are there because nobody knows how to help them. In July they are excited that Bright path will open. This is a crisis center that everyone in the County can use, children, adults, drug and alcohol, mental health co-occurring, it is a beautiful facility. You won't have to go to an ER anymore. If someone in your family is having a crisis you can go there and it is a pleasant place, where you can get the help.

Commissioner Marseglia indicated that she had lost her daughter Becky 21 years ago to suicide. Since she has been Commissioner, they have started the suicide task force. She acknowledged the Wolfs and who have helped launch things. Thanked Council for bringing up Mental Health which is very important. Then, indicated that they have a Veterans Response Team.

**Council President Tokmajian** thanked the First Responders in the Township and members from the School District, including the School Board Members who were present.

**Dr. Victoria Velazquez**, interim Superintendent of the Bensalem Township School District, indicated that it was an honor to be here to discuss this and to have this conversation tonight. The social workers on behalf of the district work really hard with all of the families within the community. They are partners with many of the Township's First Responders and they help as well at that point in time when they need that help the most. They have had the help from Care Solace which helped to put mental health supports in place for families and their staff members as well. This is very important to the School District and the community.

A member of the School Board Directors indicated that she appreciates the opportunity to have this conversation and be part of breaking down the stigma. We are all touched in one way or another with mental health and just being able to be a part of breaking down the stigma is important to the school district.

**Mr. Rodger Allen**, School Board Director, thanked council for recognizing mental health because this is an important issue for all. Mental health struggles are prevalent not only in our schools but in our churches and right here in our homes. Check on your neighbors and your friends that you have not talked to in a while and reach out because you don't know what everyone is going through. Even those who seem so happy or have everything together, you don't know what they are struggling with on the inside. He personally has had family members struggle with mental health.

**Council President Tokmajian** recognized a non-profit organization which is Abbey's Bakery. Council President Tokmajian met Jon about 20 years ago and coincidentally it was on Cinco de Mayo and it happened to be his daughter's birthday. It wasn't under the most ideal circumstances. Jon has been the Executive Manager of Bensalem's long-time restaurants and has dedicated many years managing and serving our community. Since then, Council President Tokmajian and his wife continue to frequent the restaurant and have gotten to know Jon. Over time, they have learned about the tragic loss of Jon's daughter Abbey and how the family chose to turn such an unimaginable loss into something positive through the creation of Abbey's Bakery, and their efforts to support mental health awareness throughout the region. Ever since hearing Jon's story he has wanted to recognize the family for the meaningful work that they have done in helping others and bringing awareness to mental health challenges, especially among young people.

**Jon Wolf** thanked Bensalem Township as well as the Mayor's office for inviting him to the meeting. He also thanked everyone for attending and recognizing the month of May as Mental Health Awareness Month. This month is very near and dear to Jon and his family's hearts for several reasons. It is not only Mental Health Awareness month it is also their daughter Abbey's birthday on May 3<sup>rd</sup>. Abbey would have turned 20 years old. They lost their beautiful daughter in November of 2020. She lost the battle with anxiety and depression taking her own life at the age of 14. Abbey was bright, talented and seemingly perfect in every way. Unfortunately, Abbey struggled with hidden challenges that they knew little about. On the surface she was a smiling, dancing cheerful teenager. Behind closed doors, she felt the struggles of isolation driven by the COVID world.

After they lost their girl, they felt the immediate need to address and bring light to the struggles our children face on a daily basis and the necessity for tough, honest conversations. They created Abbey's Bakery a small non-profit organization with the goal of raising awareness for mental

health and suicide prevention, along with the stigma that generally coincides with such issues. Abbey loved to bake; the kitchen was her happy place. They couldn't think of a better way to address mental health than combining her love of baking with need for tough conversation. They raise money by filling mason jars with her favorite recipes, tagged with Peyton hearts, and suggest that people use the time baking to open up meaningful conversations. Over the last 5 years, they have held resource fairs, given away scholarships, held volleyball tournaments, and funded Hope Squads in 3 schools across the state. None of this would have ever been possible without the incredible support from their communities. Communities like Bensalem.

Today suicide is the leading cause of death for youth and young adults from ages 15 to 34 with an average of 49,000 deaths by suicide in a year in the U.S. Suicide also is generally higher in specific occupations such as construction, medical field, as well as police and fire departments. Topics such as mental health and suicide can be difficult, but losing someone you love is much worse.

He would like to leave everyone here tonight with one lasting message. Each day everyone carries a backpack full of emotions. This backpack carries stress, hurt, anxiety, fear, grief, and so forth. Some days our backpacks are heavy and some days they are light. These backpacks are not seen by others, yet we carry them just the same. Be kind, be gentle, be compassionate, and have empathy. You never know who may need it.

**The Mayor and Council President Tokmajian** presented a certificate to Mr. and Mrs. Wolf. The Mayor indicated that if you have not had this in your family, consider yourself very lucky; the Mayor indicated that he knew first hand of such tragedy. Council President Tokmajian indicated that on behalf of the Mayor and Council, Tokmajian, Sloane, Wenzel, Kisselback and Knowles, presented a certificate for all the work that they do through Abbey's Bakery. Council President Tokmajian read the inscription:

*"Mental health is not a destination, but a process.  
It's about how you drive, not where you're going."  
"There is hope, even when your  
brain tells you there isn't."  
You Are Enough.*

Noam Sphancer, Phd and John Green

**Council President Tokmajian** indicated that help is available and there are caring organizations and professionals in Bucks County ready to support individuals and families in need. If you or someone you know is struggling, please reach; out and Bucks County residents can contact the Lenape Valley Foundation, the National Alliance on Mental Illness NAMI, or simply dial or text 988 for immediate mental health support.

### 3. **PUBLIC COMMENT:**

**Council President Tokmajian** indicated the Public Comment will be heard at the time the agenda item is heard. Seeing no one come forward the first of two Public Comments was closed.

4. **APPROVAL OF COUNCIL MINUTES:**

**Council Vice President Sloane** indicated that on item 1 the opening of the meeting still referenced the notes from the previous council meeting and motion to approve the Minutes as corrected. **Councilman Knowles** seconded and the motion carried 5-0.

5. **CONSIDERATION OF AN ESCROW RELEASE FOR:**

Developers Request: 700 Bristol Pike – Release #2  
Location: 700 Bristol Pike  
Tax Parcel: 02-031-001  
Amount: \$237,928.80

**Phil Wursta, Township Engineer**, indicated that his office reviewed the developer’s request for escrow number 2 in the amount of \$363,182.90. All requested items have been satisfactorily completed except as noted on the attached tabulation. Based on the tabulation it is recommended that the Bensalem Township Council consider the approval of this escrow release in the amount of \$237,928.80 subject to audit by the Finance Department which should be completed in 30 days.

**Councilman Kisselback** motioned to approve the Escrow Release #2 for 700 Bristol Pike, Tax Map Parcel 02-031-001 in the amount of \$237,928.80 as presented in the memorandum. **Council Vice President Sloane** seconded and the motion carried 5-0.

6. **CONSIDERATION OF THE 2026 COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT PROGRAM AND THE PROPOSED USE FOR THE ADA CURB CUT UPGRADES, FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICES-HOMELESS SHELTER, PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION, HOUSING REHAB AND SENIOR CENTER:**

**Solicitor Pizzo** indicated that the fiscal year for the Township’s Community Development Block Grant Program runs from July 1st to June 30<sup>th</sup> of each year. Prior to the start of the upcoming fiscal year, the Administration has to present to Council for their approval the proposed use of the Township’s Community Development Block Grant monies for the upcoming year.

This year the Township is expected to receive slightly over \$450,000 of funds. The allotment is similar to what has been presented over the last several years. \$312,000 would go to the Township’s ongoing ADA Curb Cut Upgrade Program. Mr. Chaykowski’s memo indicated that just in the last 5 years alone the Township did 50 ramps in 2022, 58 ramps in phase 2 of 2022, 49 ramps in 2023, 40 in 2024, and 27 in 2025. Those have been in various neighborhoods throughout the Township, Springdale, The Coves, Neshaminy Valley, Growden Manor and Belmont Ridge. The program has been going on for years beyond 2022. Those are just the most recent examples. The proposal is obviously to continue to put monies towards that program in 2026.

As Mr. Chaykowski noted in the memorandum to Council, those monies have to be used in residential neighborhoods and cannot be used on State Highways or on business properties.

There was some discussion at the last meeting regarding the Kohl's shopping center. The Township could not put these monies toward that particular property. In addition to the ADA Curb Cut Program, funding to support the Levittown Homeless Shelter Facility that the Township has funded for many years and serves all of Lower Bucks County. The ongoing Housing Rehabilitation Program, upgrades to the Senior Center, monies to the Township for Program Administration for all of these various aspects of the CDBG program.

The Mayor and Mr. Chaykowski are asking for Council's approval for the program of 2026-2027 fiscal year.

**Council President Tokmajian** asked is this just specific to ADA Curb Cut upgrades or is there any possibility of investing in just sidewalks in general?

**Solicitor Pizzo** indicated that it would have to be for the ADA component of the program. That is the triggering mechanism for the funding to be able to be spent on that. These are HUD dollars that the Township administers, unlike the rest of the County, which those communities their CDBG funds flow through the County. Here in Bensalem, we get them directly from HUD and the Township administers their monies themselves.

**Council President Tokmajian** indicated that there may be a few areas that the school district has identified for sidewalks. And if at that point if Council deems it as a feasible option, and ADA curbs need to be put into those sections, if Council decides to do that it?

**Solicitor Pizzo** indicated that as long as they are residential areas, that would work. There is a program out there that is called "Safe Routes to Schools" which is a Grant Program that is specifically for sidewalks in communities; as the name suggests, to create safe routes to walk to schools. If the school district wants to pass along to Mr. Chaykowski the areas in the Township that they believe sidewalks might be a benefit, the Township could start working on that program and see if any of those areas might be eligible for those monies.

**Councilman Knowles** indicated that the Township collects monies in lieu of for sidewalks, if some sidewalks were adjacent to a ramp or something that needed sidewalk work the Township could also do that.

**Solicitor Pizzo** indicated that was correct.

**Council Secretary Wenzel** asked if this could be used on state roads as long as it was a residential neighborhood?

**Solicitor Pizzo** indicated not on state highways under any circumstances.

**Council Vice President Sloane** indicated that the \$20,000 that is set aside for the senior center upgrades, does the Township know what is planned for that this year?

**Solicitor Pizzo** indicated new carpeting and the senior center is proposing some interior work, some interior renovations.

**Council Vice President Sloane** indicated that he would reach out to Director Chaykowski and get some more information.

**Council Secretary Wenzel** motioned to move forward with the consideration of the 2026 Community Development Block Grant Program, and the proposed use for the ADA Curb Curt Upgrades, Family Support Services-Homeless Shelter, Program Administration, Housing Rehab and Senior Center. **Council Vice President Sloane** seconded and the motion carried 5-0.

7. **PUBLIC COMMENT:**

**Council President Tokmajian** asked if there was anyone in the audience who would like to speak. The following constituents came forward:

**Jenny**, 2650 Mechanicsville Road, is one of the Coordinators at Bucks County Food Pantry, formerly Harvest Ministries. Their pantry works with Bucks County Opportunity Council and Philabundance that services 500 local families weekly. Philabundance has taken half of their food away by removing Bucks County from the Retail Rescue Program. The program works through Feeding America to take coded, close to code, or excess foods from our local grocery stores and give them to local food pantries. Originally half of their retail rescue was being delivered directly to them by Philabundance. Philabundance decided they didn't have the manpower to come into Bucks County to give Bucks County Food Pantry their food.

After much fundraising they bought their own refrigerated truck to do the pickups. Philabundance often called on Bucks County Food Pantry to pick up other stores that Philabundance were unable to get to. From July of 2025 to April of 2026 Bucks County Food Pantry moved 1.2 million pounds of food just for Philabundance that stayed in the Bensalem community.

Local stores indicated that their hands are tied and they have contracts with Feeding America and Philabundance. The people that Bucks County Food Pantry have worked with for years, Philabundance, told them not to talk to their stores, don't approach them, they are not authorized.

Philabundance is picking up food from our local grocery stores and taking it to the people in Philadelphia and not giving it to our local community.

We here in Bensalem need to take back our local grocery stores and make sure the food stays here.

Jenny thanked Council Secretary Wenzel for recommending that she come to a Council meeting to speak regarding her concerns.

**Council Secretary Wenzel** asked the Mayor if it is possible for the Administration and Council with legal guidance to write a letter to Philabundance asking for a portion of the food to stay in Bensalem?

**The Mayor** indicated that if someone from Bucks County Food Pantry would make an appointment to come into the office and give his office some of the information of where they could go, he will certainly do that.

**Council Vice President Sloane** indicated that he was curious as to why they dropped Bucks County Food Pantry from their list of charities in the first place.

**Jenny** indicated that they have said many times in the past that Bensalem is not an “underserved” community. Philabundance is taking the food from our grocery stores and giving it to Philadelphia.

**Council Vice President Sloane** asked if there is another pantry network that they can associate with that can help get them into a broader support network?

**Jenny** indicated that they have worked with the Bucks County Opportunity Council which is the main one in the County. It is a bit of a monopoly.

**Councilman Kisselback** asked Jenny if they had to register people to give food to and wouldn't that be her argument in her favor in terms of these are the people, who qualify and they have the record of who they are?

**Jenny** indicated that is what is so frustrating because they are held to a higher standard than other pantries.

**Council Vice President Sloane** wondered if there was an argument to be made to get the Bucks County Opportunity Council back inside the Philabundance network or is that bridge burned?

**Jenny** indicated that they are still working with one part of Philabundance with their fresh produce program in which they still get food from them. Philabundance is reviewing their contract which is up on July 1<sup>st</sup>. Philabundance provides them with 12 to 16,000 pounds of fresh produce weekly in which the County gets 3,000 pounds of that.

**Council Vice President Sloane** indicated that maybe the Township can help with the contract negotiation and get them back in with Philabundance at least to get them back inside the network.

**Council President Tokmajian** indicated that they recognize the good work that the Bucks County Opportunity Council for many, many years does and suggested that she reach out to the Mayor's office and schedule an appointment to discuss the matter. If Council would like to attend that meeting maybe they can put their heads together to try and figure out a resolution.

**Council Secretary Wenzel** asked those who were watching the Council meeting if they could possibly help by bringing a bag of groceries to the Bucks County Opportunity Council pantry.

**Ann Herring**, President of the Glenn Ashton Farm Civic Association who indicated that she and a lot of her neighbors met with Joe Pizzo, Ken Ferris and Ken Farrall today in a meeting about the women's recovery center what was done as far as approvals to be opening on Dunston Road. Their concerns are regarding the safety aspect, evacuation, all of those kinds of things which were discussed at length today during the meeting.

**Mrs. Herring** updated her neighbors that were not in attendance for the meeting and stated that the Township has approved and the home has met all of the requirements. Township is still waiting for the State approvals. The people who are running it and the owner invited the surrounding neighbors to tour the home. While the tour alleviated some of her concerns there were still questions that needed to be answered.

They have taken the four bedrooms in the house and have put three beds in each one totally 12 occupants. The living room was converted into a bedroom with three beds but indicated that the one master bedroom will be used solely by the supervising person on site.

The occupants will pay a monthly fee and they are not allowed to have cars on site, but imagines they will have visitors that will be pre-approved.

Mrs. Herring indicated that she feels that there is not much that she can do other than maybe address the Township Ordinances so that they can tighten them up. As much as she supports recovery homes she feels as though it is a wonderful idea as far as to what they are trying to do. But, the kind of instability that leaves a person to this situation and was wondering if the chaos that surrounded them would follow them there, what would that mean for their safety? They feel that the character of where they live is going to change and wants to know what to do to make things as safe as possible.

**Kim Speiser**, 635 Ashton Road, looked into the laws for these kinds of houses and does not think that you can leave these people in these houses alone. The women running the house indicated that she will leave on occasion all of the patients there by themselves. In her neighborhood the zoning is getting horrendous and things are looking real ugly.

**Mrs. Herring** indicated that she understood this house to be for people in recovery and not for domestic violence victims.

**John Otto, Sr.**, 4714 Yates Road, and has lived there for 10 years. Mr. Otto indicated that he was a recovery addict himself and knows what goes on inside these homes. He didn't buy into a million-dollar neighborhood to have that kind of a facility placed in his neighborhood. Mr. Otto is trying to figure out how did this wind up in his neighborhood? Who presented this to Council that wound up in his neighborhood? He doesn't want it in his neighborhood.

**John Arabenic**, 864 Ashton Road, indicated that a lot of his neighbors are against this recovery house and does not know how it got into a residential zoned area. Is concerned that they will not be paying school taxes? He proposed that they should wear ankle bracelets to keep track of them.

**Mrs. Herring** indicated that the woman who is running the house said that the women who will occupy the house will have to submit to weekly drug tests. She is not sure how they are going to implement that. She hopes that this is going to be the case because if they are slipping while they are there will obviously be an issue for the neighbors as well. The house is zoned as a RA-1 district and is aware that if they want to have a home office or something like that there is a certain percentage of the square footage that is allowed for a home office to be declared as a home office. This is a 100% for-profit business that's going to be a residential home. This is a type of zoning that needs to be tightened to prevent this kind of element in their neighborhood.

**George Campbell**, 709 Kleckner Road, pointed out the three new Council members and recognized the two seniors. There were 15mph signs put in by the association back in the 70's and indicated that the speeding is terrible through his neighborhood. He knows there will be Uber Drivers and shuttles and there is a need for speedbumps. There are kids roaming the neighborhood and safety is the number one priority. Mr. Campbell asked what permits have been pulled on this house to get it compliant? Does he have the right to know?

**Council President Tokmajian** indicated the he had the right to submit a Right To Know request.

**Mr. Campbell** wanted to know if they have done anything for handicap accessibility? Have the vanities been changed for wheelchair access? Is there a ramp to the house? The house is in a flood zone. Where do permits come for flood homes? He proposed that the officials that were elected into Council follow through with the Administration to see if permits were pulled, and check if they have done any work in the house? If they didn't, they need to be sited.

**Robert Trush**, 4728 Albert Road, moved back to Bensalem and has invested a lot of money in this area and had no idea about this recovery home. There is only one way in and one way out of that road. He is very concerned for the people walking their dogs, or just walking along the road because if someone is back there visiting and not happy with their other half and come flying down that road there could be a serious incident. He has shared his concerns and would like to see some reaction.

**Allan Payne**, 511 Kleckner Road, which is next door to the recovery house. Mr. Payne is proud to live in Bensalem. He has enjoyed his street being plowed before Route 13; the Township has a superior Police Department. Few years back there were some undesirable neighbors living there who were graffitiing in the back underneath the I-95 bridge and one call the next day the graffiti was gone. Bensalem is a great town to live in and he hopes to see it stay that way. He feels like he has been blindsided by this and doesn't sound like anything that is going to benefit him.

Mr. Payne is already seeing traffic just from the people that are curious as to what is going on. He is hoping that he can get clarity on what it really is and what is really going on. He heard it is going to be short term. 15 people living there sounds more like a hotel than a residence. Are there sprinklers required in the house? Just looking for clarity as to what is going on with the recovery house and wanted to go on record as being against it.

**Mary Ellen Cook**, 713 Bridgewater Road, doesn't live in Glen Ashton but can sympathize with the residents there. If six months down the road the cops are being called on a continuous basis because it is a nuisance down there; what repercussions does the Township have at that point? Since it is a residential area and located in the back where you would have to travel through the neighborhood to get there, she can see the residents' concerns. Does the recovery home, which is a business, have the right or any repercussion if they are not good business owners?

**Council President Tokmajian** asked Solicitor Pizzo to provide a summary of what has happened over the last two weeks.

**Solicitor Pizzo** indicated that going back over a number of years, noted that there was a time not too long ago when recovery homes in Pennsylvania were wholly unregulated. This posed a problem for many communities, including Bensalem where they found themselves confronted with a number of the concerns that were being voiced this evening with absolutely no ability either at the local level or the state level for any of them to be addressed.

Solicitor Pizzo testified in front of the State Human Services Committee on the issue of regulations of recovery homes because it was becoming a pervasive problem here in Bensalem and neighboring communities like Bristol Township, Falls and Middletown. Ultimately the State started a licensing procedure for recovery homes and those regulations were adopted sometime back in 2021.

There are a number of laws that the Township has to comply with, the Fair Housing Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act, chief among them. It requires that individuals who are in recovery, drug and alcohol recovery, who are considered under Federal Law to be individuals with disabilities. They are to be afforded an equal opportunity to live in clean, safe, drug-free neighborhoods. As a result, that is the purpose recovery houses serve for individuals coming out of rehab, transitioning into recovery homes in residential neighborhoods and ultimately back into the mainstream not needing the support services that come with residing in a recovery home.

Bensalem's Zoning Code, which requires the Township to provide for recovery homes, sober living environments somewhere in the residential areas of the Township provides for them in the zoning districts where the Township's largest homes or largest lots are located, the RA and the RA-1 Districts.

That makes this use a use by right in Glen Ashton Farms which is a RA-1 neighborhood. In the case of this particular home, and as mentioned, there are a number of group homes and recovery homes throughout the Township. You don't know the dozens of them in the Township where they are located because they are treated and operate just like any home. That is what the law requires the Township to treat them as. The Township doesn't always like that it has to deal with the issues that sometimes arise from these homes, but the Township cannot and will not discriminate against them because this Township does not or will not discriminate against any individuals.

In the case of this particular property, the property owner applied for a Zoning Certification and Building Permits to operate a recovery home. The Township was told that it would be for up to 15 persons, that it would be for women and that it would be for women in recovery. This is recovery from drug and alcohol addiction. It is not to be a Safe-house, it is not to be a facility for women coming out of abusive situations, battered situations; it is not licensed as such a facility.

From the Township's perspective, the Township viewed this property as exactly what the Township is told it is. To a certain extent, when any property owner of the 20 some odd thousand properties in this Township comes into the Township with an application, the Township takes it as this is what it is going to be.

This application says that it is going to be a recovery home for up to 15 individuals who are going to be women in recovery. The Township went about processing the necessary permits. The Township was told that one of the spaces in the house was to be converted from a living room into a bedroom. Building permit applications were submitted. They were reviewed, the necessary building permit was issued for that room to be converted. Inspections were done of that work. As to the balance of the facility, because of the number of individuals residing in it in a recovery setting, they were required to install a hardwired smoke detector systems into the house that was permitted by the Township's Fire Marshal's office.

The installation was permitted, it was inspected and passed inspection. The house is located in a floodplain, not a floodway. The house itself, as it was explained, the majority of the front yard and much of the house is in the floodplain, the rear part of the house and the backyard is not. Under the Township's Zoning and Building Ordinances work inside of the house, it does not require additional permits or zoning relief in order to do work inside the house. To build onto the house or to add additional parking or anything of that nature would require a trip to the Zoning Hearing Board because it would be work inside of the floodplain

In this particular instance, none of the work that was done, no work has been proposed that would trigger having to go to the Zoning Hearing Board because the house is in the floodplain. The house and the other houses along that street are in floodplain and have been since they were built. They were built at a time when the Township had different regulations governing what you could or couldn't do within a floodplain, they're there. They are there to be occupied whether as a single residence, which he has imagined that house has been for all of the years up to now, or as a recovery house.

As long as they are not expanding the house and as long as they are not adding parking areas, no additional zoning relief is necessary. That is the Township's Regulations and they are consistent with FEMA Regulations and regulations that the Township gets from the Army Corps of Engineers regarding wetlands and floodways that they oversee.

The plans for the house were inspected by the Township to make sure that they comply with the Township's Housing Code. Every house in the Township, whether it is this one or anyone's home can only have ultimately so many people living in it. That is based on a calculation of bedrooms, number of people that can be in the bedroom, square footage of the bedroom. All of that goes into a formula that determines how many people can occupy this house.

In addition to the Township the State has regulations for recovery homes that tell you how many people can be in a house. They use the same formula, but they use slightly different numbers. In both cases whether it is the Township's standard or the States standard the bedrooms in this house, the number of people they're proposing comply both with the Township's Housing Code and with the state regulations regarding recovery homes.

This house can legally and practically accommodate up to 15 individuals. One of the bedrooms there is going to be the bedroom for the full-time House Manager. The numbers change if one person is occupying one of the five bedrooms, now the remaining four bedrooms can occupy up to three individuals each. The total number of people that can be in that house who are in recovery is in fact 12, not 15. That is by virtue of them using one of the five bedrooms for the House Manager.

The House Manager is a requirement under the state regulations governing recovery homes. Before 2021 these facilities were not required to have them at all. They are now. That individual has to meet the state's requirements for serving in that position. There is some minimal amount of training that the state requires. The state, as part of the application for the license, they have to identify who the House Manager is, what the training is and what the training is that they're going to get.

That is one of the many things that they have to submit to the state in order to get the license to operate the recovery home. State law requires the house to have a communal space, like a living room.

As the neighbors who toured the house today, along with the Mayor, Solicitor Pizzo, Ken Ferris, this house has a living room. The house before being converted for a recovery home, had a family room and a living room in the front. The state law requires to have a kitchen that has a refrigerator and a stove and a sink and a pantry for the residents to store food. This house has all of those things. If it didn't, the state who has performed an inspection of the facility would identify the house as lacking in one of those particular areas.

The state law requires that it has bathrooms, it has bathrooms. The state law requires it has exits that are lit, it has exits that are lit. The state law doesn't require the fire alarm system, it only requires fire extinguishers. The Township goes a step beyond and requires the fire alarm system which has been installed and has passed the test. Fire sprinklers are not required by the state law and for the Township Building Code and Housing Code; this house is not required to have sprinklers. Any housing structure that houses 16 people or more is required to be sprinklered. Anything housing 15 or under is not.

The house is required to have an emergency evacuation plan that is submitted by the property owner to the state as part of its licensing. When that is approved by the state, the Township will get a copy of that as well.

The state requires them to submit a list of all of the house regulations, all of the rules that these ladies are going to be required to follow during their residency in the house. That has to be approved by the state. Some of the regulations shared with the Township. No more than one visitor will be allowed at the house at a time. That visitor has to sign in, has to be pre-approved by the House Manager. Visitors are not allowed anywhere in the house other than the common area. All of the common areas of the house, the front yard, the backyard all have security cameras to observe and record what is going on in the house 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

The Township is told by the owners of the house that every one of their applicants is going to have to undergo a background check. Every one of them is going to undergo an initial drug screen to make sure they are free and clear of drugs and anyone staying at the house is going to have weekly random drug testing. Every occupant of the house is to make sure that they have remained clean and sober during their time in the house. Anyone who violates those requirements of the house is immediately banished from the house because the purpose of the house is to provide a clean and sober environment for individuals coming out of rehab and transitioning back into society.

None of the individuals coming into this facility will be court adjudicated. In some cases, people going into recovery are going into recovery houses through the court system. This house is not taking anyone via the court system, everyone is going to be private. They will either be admitting themselves or coming out of rehab facilities like Livengrin.

The House Manager previously worked at Livengrin and assumed it was among her qualifications to be the House Manager. She has a college degree and is going for her Masters degree online to be a licensed Social Worker. None of it has to do with the Township, but everything to do with the State Licensing.

The Township has had two meetings with the ownership to try to get answers to any number of the questions that were asked at the last Council meeting or who have been submitted to the Mayor's office by a number of the residents from that area by either email or telephone.

Solicitor Pizzo reviewed the file and went over it with the Director of Building and Planning, Mr. Ken Farrall as to all of the steps that went into this facility being approved to occupy that facility.

The license through the State is pending. The licensing is through the State Department of Drug and Alcohol. If you observe and have complaints regarding the operation of the facility, the residents can make complaints directly to the Department of Drug and Alcohol.

The licensing is done on an annual basis. When the license comes time for renewal it will undergo the renewal process that the state has. Included among that are any complaints that are investigated and found to be valid.

The Township has a good number of these facilities and has never received a complaint about any of them. If you see something, say something. Make a 911 call to the police. The police will respond and address whatever it is within their power to address.

**Council Vice President Sloane** asked Solicitor Pizzo to elaborate a little bit more on as we as a Township and the residents can help to make sure that the state regulations are being enforced?

**Solicitor Pizzo** indicated that much of the Township's oversight is dealing with the physical structure itself. The Township gets to perform inspections on which he believes to be an annual basis, to make sure that the things that have to be operating, have to be functioning. In terms of the individuals occupying the facility itself, is entirely up to the state who performs their inspections and their routine reviews and approvals.

**Council Vice President Sloane** indicated that would be part of their annual review for their licensing. They'll make sure that it is operating in compliance with the state regulations.

**Solicitor Pizzo's** understanding of the state process is that the department issues provisional licenses valid for a period of no more than 6 months. When the department finds that a drug or alcohol recovery house has either substantially but not completely complied with all of the requirements for licensure; it's complying with a course of correction approved by the department, or has existing deficiencies that will not adversely alter the health, safety and welfare of the residents.

If, during the review process for the license, either initially or once in operation, if the state sees issues that need to be corrected instead of issuing a full one-year could issue a provisional to give the facility the opportunity to address whatever needs to be addressed. The state can also revoke the license if it finds that it is not operating within the requirements of the state licensing laws.

All of the personnel that are employed by the facility have to meet whatever the state requirements for individuals within that facility. The training that is required, they have to certify that they've met all of the training requirements that the state puts into place. They have to maintain records for each of the individuals who live there. Those records have to be available on site and for the state inspectors when requested, and turned over immediately.

These licensing procedures are there not only to protect the community but the individuals in these homes themselves, because there were a lot of facilities operating in this state in less than reputable ways; and for individuals who this was the only place they had to go were being taken advantage of.

State licensing is there to make sure that this facility is a nice place to live, is a good place to live, a clean place to live, a safe place to live as much for those residents; as it is for the health, safety, and welfare of the community at large.

The health, safety and welfare of the community at large and these residents both are what are being reviewed and hopefully protected by the state during the licensing and operation procedure for these recovery homes.

The individuals who reside there get to make complaints to the state just as the neighbors would if the neighbors saw something that would warrant making a complaint.

Just going through what the state requires for the bedrooms. Each bedroom has to have a bed in good repair with a solid foundation, pillows, sheets, and other bedding in good condition.

**Council President Tokmajian** asked Solicitor Pizzo if the annual inspections are made public?

**Solicitor Pizzo** indicated that he did not know what the state's procedures are. But he did know that there is a website where the state has a recovery house registry; that the Department of Drug and Alcohol has that will list a recovery house, the name of the licensee, the address.

The Drug and Alcohol registry is on the Drug and Alcohol website. It is updated annually. Lists all of the Drug and Alcohol Recovery houses, names, addresses.

**Council Vice President Sloane** indicated that the inspection results are listed on the website. Also, there are other state regulations, other departments like childcare centers and stuff like that. Once the license is granted for those kinds of institutions, that's when it's listed on the website. Inspection results are shown so that they can see any deficiencies that might crop up and can track those as a community.

**Mrs. Herring** indicated that her question was just that when she had done a search of how many are in Bensalem because she has been told there are dozens. If there are dozens, they are not on the registry that she saw.

**Solicitor Pizzo** indicated that there are dozens of group homes within the Township which cater to the vast universe of persons eligible for those kinds of services and that kind of housing. Within the universe of recovery homes, five or six probably sounds about right.

**Council President Tokmajian** asked Solicitor Pizzo if the guidelines that he was reading off would be able to get a copy to Mrs. Herring and then she would be able to pass that around?

**Solicitor Pizzo** indicated certainly, but they can also get it off of the website at the State's Department of Drug and Alcohol.

**Melanie Goldstein**, 4419 East Yates Road, indicated that some of the homes in Glen Ashton are less than pristine and are close to be almost derelict. As a resident you are hard pressed to get something done about it. She feels that with this particular house they will be under such scrutiny that the home will be kept better than some of the homes owned by "regular people". Also, when someone moves into Glen Ashton, whoever moves in is not scrutinized and they don't know what goes on inside their closed doors.

Mrs. Goldstein thanked Solicitor Pizzo for his comprehensive report. But, after meeting the woman who is going to manage the home, she said that her bedroom does have 3 beds in it and will be used sort of as a reward for residents that are doing very well. They will pay \$150 less a week and will be able to stay in that room which is the only bedroom with access to a T.V. as an extra privilege. It was said that no visitors are allowed. Also, she will not be doing weekly drug testing on every resident, it will be random.

The House Manager indicated that some of the residents will need to go to a meeting or to a doctor's appointment or perhaps a job interview and that she will be driving them. If the House Manager is driving them around and there has not been an assigned trustee yet, she is leaving the women that are living there on their own. Mrs. Goldstein asked the House Manager if she would be looking for volunteer drivers and she would be willing to help. But the House Manager said she was going to do it all on her own first or maybe have access to Uber gift cards.

Mrs. Goldstein doesn't think that 15 women will be able to access the 2 bathrooms and a powder room along with the two couches in the living room or the one dresser in each bedroom that houses these beds.

**Solicitor Pizzo** indicated that the operator of the recovery house did provide those who took the tour with her business card, with a phone number, an email address, and that the facility's open for anyone to visit and again, if you see something, you say something.

**Council Vice President Sloane** also indicated to the residents to not to hesitate to feel free to reach out to the Township, Council members, or the Mayor's office so that there can be a running log of what the state is getting as well.

**John Otto**, 4714 Yates Road, was wondering who owned the house and how did they have the means to file for a recovery home?

**Solicitor Pizzo** indicated that the property was sold sometime last fall.

**John Otto** indicated that they filed for a permit and the Township recognized the permit and they have to recognize the fact that they're putting in a recovery home. Council can't stop them because the law doesn't permit Council to do that. At some point the residents should have been notified because it is their community. Will they be able to build onto their property to make that facility bigger?

**Council Vice President Sloane** indicated that they can ask, they can apply. It would be on all of the boards to adjudicate that.

**John Otto** asked Council if the residents have no say in stopping this?

**Council President Tokmajian** indicated that as Solicitor Pizzo stated, Council has to follow Federal Laws. There are Federal Laws that they have to abide by.

**John Otto** indicated that the only way they can stop it is to go to Tomlinson.

**Council President Tokmajian** indicated that they have a right to go to their local officials.

**John Otto** asked if the residents of the recovery home will be allowed to walk around in their neighborhood? Mr. Otto lived in a recovery house and knew all of the pros and cons of the people that go in and out of them. If crime starts to go up in their neighborhood who is going to help them? He does not want this facility in his neighborhood.

**Kim Speiser** indicated that this is a very frustrating process. What she wrote and what she brought up for Council is Chapter 704 Staffing Requirements for Drug and Alcohol requirements activities. If they have the right people staffing it, they should have nothing to worry about.

**Council President Tokmajian** wanted to recognize the comment of tightening ordinances. Council, as well as the Administration, is looking into tightening ordinances. Regardless, if not maybe specific to this one or the RCO which was tightened up. They need to look at Data Centers, and looking at drafting an ordinance to that effect. They are looking to revamp, revise and create a whole new system for the Township Muni Codes. Council will be looking at the language of the Township Ordinances. The Township invest significant number of resources into the Township Police Department. If you see something, hear something, call the police, that is what they are there for.

**George Campbell**, 709 Kleckner Road, the recovery house is protected under a lot of laws. The residents don't have those laws. If they say, its going on and they feel its not going on, then they can say they are being harassed. Then they can sue the residents for harassment. If these people come onto his property there isn't much he can do because they are protected.

**Council Vice President Sloane** indicated their discussion on Mental Health Awareness and the co-responder's program, that is the exact kind of thing of how the Township is equipped to deal with these kinds of instances. The residents do have protections in place. He strongly urges anyone who feels threatened, who feels that their rights are being infringed contact the police and they will respond appropriately.

**Council President Tokmajian** asked if there is any way the Township could have a traffic study done by the Township Traffic Officer.

**The Mayor** indicated that it has been done in the past and can do it again.

**Dr. Kristina Gregory**, 2218 Bristol Pike, asked why the Civic Association wasn't informed of the recovery house? Why put a recovery facility so far away from a main traffic route that has access to public transportation and will have to go through the entire neighborhood to get out to the main road?

**Councilman Knowles** indicated that they didn't put it there that the house was bought. The Township cannot advise a Civic Association of a person who is buying a residential property it is against federal law.

**Solicitor Pizzo** indicated that if someone were constructing a new building or if someone needed zoning relief, no public notice is given for those kinds of activities. But an individual moving into a house, Fair Housing Laws were enacted back in the 1960s and 70s specifically because people were being notified that a house was being sold to a people of a particular color or religion or nationality. Fair Housing Laws apply across the spectrum. They are not just for race, they are not just for religion, they are for people with disabilities as well and these are individuals with disabilities.

**Council President Tokmajian** indicated that if Dr. Gregory wanted to ask them the reason why they purchased the house, Council has the information and can pass it along to her.

**Council Secretary Wenzel** indicated he was part of an association for a short period of time and in the association, it had the approval of people moving in there. Is this something Glen Ashton can add in their association for their neighborhood to approve people who are moving in and out?

**Solicitor Pizzo** indicated that he was not sure of the situation that Council Secretary Wenzel was describing, but again the Solicitor is not aware of any situation under which the Township would be within the law to begin to notifying neighborhoods of people that were buying houses.

**Council President Tokmajian** indicated that there is a difference between a civic association and a homeowner's association.

**Council Secretary Wenzel** indicated that the Township Police Department has a program for cameras and if something goes on in their neighborhood you can register your security camera with the police department. Log on to the Bensalem Police Department and register for that program.

**George Campbell**, 709 Kleckner Road, suggested to have "Uncle Sam" put two cameras at the I-95 overpass in that area because that is the trouble area.

**Council President Tokmajian** indicated that Council will take that into consideration and can look into that to see if it is an option.

**Allan Payne**, 511 Kleckner Road, does he have to have No Trespassing Signs posted? He has a very large piece of property that is right next door to the recovery house. A lot of people mistake that area for park land and go back there.

**Council President Tokmajian** indicated that he has every right to put those signs up on his property. It would help to convey that it is private property.

Seeing no one else come forward, the second Public Comment portion was closed.

## 8. **OTHER BUSINESS:**

**Councilman Knowles** was looking forward to opening night of the Amphitheater that will be hosting "Gold Dust Women" a Fleetwood Mac tribute band. Appreciated Mrs. Goldstein's comments and indicated that he had 14 people in his house growing up and only had two bathrooms, and somehow, they managed. Understood her points and thought that a person like herself should be able to volunteer in places like that and help out, she would be an excellent choice.

**Council Secretary Wenzel** appreciated everyone coming out tonight and voicing their opinion. As it sounds by the state, it looks as though Council is pretty strapped here. There isn't a whole lot they can do. They don't know what is going on unless people tell them. Again, this is the perfect reason for people in the Township to come to these meetings and let Council know what is going on in their neighborhoods.

**Councilman Kisselback** indicated that if anyone was listening to what was said this evening believes they should have a pretty good understanding as to what can and what cannot be done. From Council's point of view, they are going to do whatever they can to protect the citizens of this Township but are limited based on the state regulations and the federal regulations as to what their capabilities are, which were articulated by the Township Solicitor, Mr. Pizzo.

**Solicitor Pizzo** indicated that he appreciated everyone's understanding and it is not always easy being the bearer of bad news. As the Mayor said when they met with the 15 or so of the neighbors earlier today, this is not the first time that the Township has been confronted with residents upset with one of these facilities coming into their neighborhoods. In most cases, those fears have been allayed as things developed. Again, please understand what the Township is, and Council has said, and the Mayor has said, let the Township know; and to be the Township's eyes and ears, and the things that the Township can do to protect the quality of life the Township will certainly do.

Solicitor Pizzo updated Council on the Data Centers as mentioned. Has some preliminary ideas that he would like to share with Council and will be sending out some time next week with an eye toward public discussion at the June 8<sup>th</sup> Council meeting.

**The Mayor** thanked everyone for coming out. He had met earlier today to try to lay some groundwork for the organization. The Mayor and Council care for the people. If this were something that was moving in next to him, he would feel the same way that they do and wonder why they can't do this somewhere else, he gets it. Whoever has that sector the police will be patrolling it more frequently and also in Glen Ashton.

Missed the Memorial Day Parade due to weather but they did have the service down at the VFW to honor our armed forces. Tomorrow night starts the summer series at the Amphitheater.

**Council Vice President Sloane** indicated that this is really a partnership he sees. They are limited unfortunately by state and federal regulations. Please help convey the information, what you see to Council, and they will take that information and act on it. They will supply support and police services, will liaise with the state, whatever it takes. Whatever they can do to make the residents feel more comfortable in their neighborhoods. If this were going on next to him, he would feel the exact same way.

Three nights ago, his next-door neighbor had his car stolen out of his driveway at 5:00am. Crime in our neighborhoods is real, it's not necessarily local. The Police Department is going to put out a PSA about this, his neighbor caught this on video. It took them about 43 seconds for them to drive up, disable the alarm system, push the car out of the driveway, start it. Because they can clone your key signal from your house and drive the car away. He suggested to look into purchasing a Faraday pouch, it is essentially a bag or pouch that blocks the car signal. The club that you put on your steering wheel is another deterrent. Look into motion activated lights and cameras outside of your home. The Bensalem Police responded immediately and were on site right away so if you see something, say something.

Happy memorial Day, thank you to all of the Veterans that have served. Memorial Day is one where we remember not just the Veterans but those that gave the ultimate sacrifice.

**Council President Tokmajian**, Happy Memorial Day, thank you to all of our Vets, including his father who is sitting in the audience. He knows it is not what the residents want to hear that Council is bound to state and federal laws, and he would have the same questions and concerns that they all have.

9. **ADJOURNMENT:**

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

The Bensalem Township Council Meeting of May 26<sup>th</sup>, 2026 can be viewed in its entirety at the following websites:

[www.bensalempa.gov](http://www.bensalempa.gov)

or

[www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com)

**Respectfully Submitted,**

**Debra F. McBreen  
Recording Secretary**