

**TOWNSHIP OF HARDWICK
COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES
WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 20, 2025**

OPENING ROLL CALL:

Mayor Jacksic called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. Committeeman Lovell (via conference phone) and Deputy Mayor Meuse were present. DPW Supervisor Campbell, Township Attorney Igor Bykov, and Municipal Clerk Shipps were also present.

SUNSHINE STATEMENT:

"Adequate notice of this meeting has been provided in accordance with the Open Public Meeting Law. " Act, P.L. 1975, Ch. 231, setting forth the time, date, place, and purpose of this Public Meeting through a legal notice published in the New Jersey Herald and The Express Times, following the Township's Annual Reorganization Meeting, at which the 2025 meeting schedule was adopted.

EXECUTIVE SESSION:

Motion made by Lovell, seconded by Meuse, and carried to go into Executive Session at 6:30 pm.

2025-53- Resolution Authorizing Executive Session for the Purpose of

WHEREAS, Section 8 of the Open Public Meeting Act, Chapter 231, P. L 1975 permits the exclusion of the public from a meeting under certain circumstances; and

WHEREAS this public body is of the opinion that such circumstances presently exist.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, by the Township Committee of the Township of Hardwick, in the County of Warren and State of New Jersey as follows:

1. The public shall be excluded from that portion of this meeting.
2. The general nature of the subject matter to be discussed is as follows:

A. Contract Negotiation

As nearly as can be ascertained, the matter or matters to be discussed at this time will be disclosed to the public when such matters are resolved.

Motion made by Lovell, seconded by Meuse, and carried to come out of Executive Session at 7:10 pm.

Township Attorney Bykov stated the committee reconvened from executive session at 7:10 PM. During the executive session, the committee discussed one matter relating to contract negotiations for township land preservation purposes. Official action was taken during the session. Minutes from the executive session will be made available when the committee determines they are no longer confidential due to public interest considerations.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Tara Mezzanotte reported on the following matters:

Explore Act Update:

- Mezzanotte will meet with Congressman Kane's new representative next week to discuss the Explore Act and related topics.
- Concerns raised about opposition groups suggesting the Delaware Water Gap area group's efforts might be used to promote National Park designation.
- Emphasized that the group's efforts are independent, include "no eminent domain" provisions, and focus on mitigating existing issues while securing representation at federal discussions.

Privacy Incident:

- A private email was inadvertently sent to 300+ recipients, with one person replying all with criticism of Mezzanotte's activities.
- Mezzanotte reported this incident for transparency, given her representation of the municipality.

Resolution Language Recommendation:

- Proposal to include standard language in all future resolutions stating opposition to National Park designation and support for maintaining the current preservation area status.
- Agreed to incorporate this language consistently going forward.

Wild and Scenic River - Paulinskill Update:

- Kendrya Close moved out of town and is no longer available as liaison; Mezzanotte continuing as interim contact.
- Senator Booker is exploring a potential funding package for all Wild and Scenic River initiatives statewide.
- Opportunity exists for three potential federal study bills due to the Warren County work.
- Timeline accelerated; may need to amend existing resolution to take advantage of simultaneous Senate and Congressional introduction.
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Rich Hashway- Owner of Krave reported on the construction of Hardwick House

Development Progress:

- Construction is progressing well, with significant dirt moving observed.
- County issues have been resolved - no more concerns about 400-foot setbacks, poles, or fencing requirements.
- Team met with Alex and Mike on-site; positive interactions reported.

Township Attorney Bykov provided a legal review regarding the COAH (Council on Affordable Housing) fee for the non-residential redevelopment project. The statute (Section 8.4 of the Municipal Land Use Law) requires all funds to be received before a Certificate of Occupancy is issued. While the law does not explicitly authorize payment plans, it does not prohibit them either. The committee may consider structuring payments (e.g., partial upfront and balance before CO issuance) if desired.

It was noted that appeals are permitted by statute, though funds in dispute must be escrowed. The assessor's role in determining equalized assessed value was emphasized. The committee discussed whether calculations could reflect the difference between prior and current assessed

values, rather than the entire new assessment, especially considering unassessed improvements lost in the fire.

The township attorney will confer with the assessor to clarify applicable valuation methods and ensure compliance while seeking equitable treatment for the applicant.

DEPARTMENT REPORT:

Tom Campbell, DPW Supervisor, reported the following:

Mill Road Soil Issue: Investigation continues regarding alleged illegal soil importation.

Township Engineer Williams conducted a site inspection, taking photographs and soil samples. The situation appears unfavorable for the homeowner.

Slab Town Creek Road Stabilization: The Town completed a bank stabilization project using fill material from the local Hardwick house demolition to prevent shoulder erosion into the river. The project was reported to DEP by a resident, resulting in DEP and hazmat investigations. After inspection, Hazmat cleared the project as compliant and closed the case.

Bob Wolff- Fire Tower/ Stillwater Fire Department Reports:

A tractor fire behind 18 Stillwater Road spread to a field and required response from both the Fire Company and Forest Fire crews. The ridge is drying quickly, though recent rain may provide temporary relief.

Stillwater Fire Company is working on outfitting a new brush truck with a slip-on skid unit, tank, and pump to improve access to woodlands, driveways, swimming pools, and ponds. Once assembled by the crew, it will serve as an additional piece of equipment for firefighting.

The Fire Company also held a successful wet-down event on Saturday.

MINUTES:

July 16, 2025, Public Session Meeting Minutes.

Motion made by Lovell, seconded by Meuse, and carried to approve July 16, 2025, minutes.

CONSENT AGENDA:

1. 2025-49 Resolution of the Township Committee of the Township of Hardwick, County of Warren, State of New Jersey Authorizing the Execution of a Contract for Providing a Complete Revaluation of All Real Property for Tax Equalization Purposes Between the Township and Appraisal Systems, Inc. in the Amount not Exceeding One Hundred Fifty-Seven Thousand, Six Hundred and Fifty Dollars (\$157,650.00).
WHEREAS, the Township of Hardwick has determined that a revaluation of all real property within the Municipality is necessary; and
WHEREAS, the Township Assessor has received a proposal, dated May 13, 2025, from Appraisal Systems, Inc. – an appraisal firm with its principal office located at 264 South Street, Building 2, Suite 1B, Morristown, NJ 07960 (hereinafter referred to as “Appraiser”); and

WHEREAS, pursuant to the relevant provisions of the Local Public Contracts Law, specifically N.J.S.A. 40A:11-5, a contract in excess of the bid threshold may be awarded without the need for public bidding if the subject matter thereof consists of professional services; and

WHEREAS, the Township wishes to enter into such contract for a complete revaluation program for the Township as of October 1, 2025, for the 2026 tax year in the amount not exceeding One Hundred Fifty-Seven Thousand, Six Hundred and Fifty Dollars (\$157,650.00); and

WHEREAS, the execution of such contract is contingent on a certification of funds available to finance the cost of such services.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Township Committee of the Township of Hardwick, County of Warren State of New Jersey that the Mayor, Township Clerk, Assessor, and/or a duly authorized designee are hereby authorized and directed to execute the Contract for Providing a Complete Revaluation of All Real Property for Tax Equalization Purposes between the Township of Hardwick and Appraisal Systems, Inc. in the amount not exceeding One Hundred Fifty-Seven Thousand, Six Hundred and Fifty Dollars (\$157,650.00), pursuant to the terms and conditions of the May 13, 2025, proposal received by the Township Assessor.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the execution of such contract is contingent upon a certification of funds available to finance the cost of such services.

2. 2025-50 Resolution of the Township Committee of the Township of Hardwick, County of Warren, State of New Jersey Authorizing the Execution of a Contract for Providing a Master Plan Reexamination Between the Township and Heyer & Gruel & Associates in the Amount Not Exceeding Nine Thousand Five Hundred Dollars (\$9,500.00).

WHEREAS, the Township of Hardwick has determined that Master Plan Reexamination within the Municipality is necessary; and

WHEREAS, the Township has received a proposal, dated May 2, 2025, from Heyer Gruel & Associates located at 236 Broad Street Red Bank, New Jersey 07701 (hereinafter referred to as “Planner”); and

WHEREAS, pursuant to the relevant provisions of the Local Public Contracts Law, specifically N.J.S.A. 40A:11-5, a contract in excess of the bid threshold may be awarded without the need for public bidding if the subject matter thereof consists of professional services; and

WHEREAS, the Township wishes to enter into such contract for a Master Plan Reexamination in the amount not exceeding Nine Thousand Five Hundred Dollars (\$9,500.00); and

WHEREAS, the execution of such contract is contingent on a certification of funds available to finance the cost of such services.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Township Committee of the Township of Hardwick, County of Warren State of New Jersey that the Mayor, Township Clerk and /or a duly

authorized designee are hereby authorized and directed to execute the Contract for Master Plan Reexamination between the Township of Hardwick and Heyer, Gruel & Associates. in the amount not exceeding Nine Thousand Five Hundred Dollars (\$9,500.00), pursuant to the terms and conditions of the May 2, 2025, proposal received by the Township.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the execution of such contract is contingent upon a certification of funds available to finance the cost of such services.

3. 2025-54- Cancellation and Refund of Taxes Due to Totally Disabled Veteran Status.

WHEREAS, the Department of Veterans Affairs has determined Raymond Skop, owner of property at Block 1001, Lot 6.01, 14-A Slabtown Creek Road, is totally disabled, and the Tax Assessor granted this exemption effective January 16, 2025, and that Mr. Skop is to be exempt from that day forward in accordance with N.J.S.A. 54:4-30:30 et seq.

2025 tax on this property	\$16,822.35
350 days = taxes to be cancelled	-\$16,131.02
15 days = taxes due	\$691.33
Taxes Paid	<u>-\$4,005.48</u>
Refund	\$3,314.15

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED by the Mayor and Committee of Hardwick Township that the Tax Collector is hereby authorized to cancel property taxes in the amount of \$16,131.02 and refund \$3,314.15 to:

Law Office of Wayne A. Stahlmann
198 Boulevard
Hasbrouck Heights, NJ 07604
Total = \$3,314.15

4. 2025-55- A Resolution Authorizing the Mayor and the Township Clerk to Execute an Agreement with the Land Conservancy of New Jersey.

WHEREAS the Township of Hardwick desires to enter into an agreement with the Land Conservancy of New Jersey; and

WHEREAS, said agreement will commence on September 1, 2025, and terminate on August 31, 2026, for a term of twelve (12) months; and

WHEREAS the total compensation under this agreement shall not exceed Twelve Thousand Dollars (\$12,000.00); and

WHEREAS compensation shall be paid at the end of each quarter in installments of Three Thousand Dollars (\$3,000.00) each; and

WHEREAS the Township Committee finds that this agreement is in the best interests of the Township and its residents;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Township Committee of the Township of Hardwick, County of Warren, State of New Jersey, that:

1. The Mayor and Township Clerk are hereby authorized and directed to execute an agreement with the Land Conservancy of New Jersey on behalf of the Township of Hardwick.
2. The term of said agreement shall be for twelve (12) months, commencing September 1, 2025 and ending August 31, 2026.
3. The total compensation under this agreement shall not exceed Twelve Thousand Dollars (\$12,000.00), to be paid quarterly in installments of Three Thousand Dollars (\$3,000.00) at the end of each quarter.
4. The Mayor and Township Clerk are authorized to execute any and all documents necessary to effectuate the terms of this Resolution.
5. This Resolution shall take effect immediately upon adoption.

5. 2025-56 Cancellation and Refund of Taxes Due to Totally Disabled Veteran Status.
WHEREAS, the Department of Veterans Affairs has determined John Simonetti, owner of property at Block 304, Lot 10.03, 8 Tara Court, is totally disabled, and the Tax Assessor granted this exemption effective July 2, 2025, and that Mr. Simonetti is to be exempt from that day forward in accordance with N.J.S.A. 54:4-30:30 et seq.

2025 tax on this property	\$14,156.33
183 days = taxes to be cancelled	-\$7,097.56
Taxes Paid	<u>-\$6,741.37</u>
Due	\$317.40

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED by the Mayor and Committee of Hardwick Township that the Tax Collector is hereby authorized to cancel property taxes in the amount of \$7,097.56.

6. 2025-57 Approving Vouchers and Claims.

WHEREAS all claims as reviewed and listed on the attached bill list are approved as reasonable and proper claims against the Township of Hardwick to be paid from its current fund; and

WHEREAS, the CFO has certified that funds are available to pay such claims.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, by the Township Committee of the Township of Hardwick, County of Warren, State of New Jersey, that the bills on the attached bill listed are authorized to be paid.

7. 2025-58 Resolution of the Township of Hardwick, County of Warren, State of New Jersey Authorizing the Execution of a Lease Agreement Between the State of New Jersey, Department of Environmental Protection and the Township for Restoration,

Preservation, Development, Improvement, Maintenance, Operation, and Interpretation of the Vass Farmstead.

WHEREAS, the State of New Jersey, through the Department of Environmental Protection, is charged with the responsibility and is empowered to acquire, hold, license, operate, manage, and protect lands which are the property of the State of New Jersey for recreation, conservation, historic, cultural and educational purposes; and

WHEREAS, the Township of Hardwick wishes to enter into a Lease Agreement, a copy of which is attached hereto and made part hereof, with the Department of Environmental Protection for the restoration, preservation, development, improvement, maintenance, operation and interpretation of the Vass Farmstead as a historic site and making it available for public visitation and recreational uses; and

WHEREAS, the Township Committee of the Township of Hardwick believes that the execution of the subject Lease Agreement is in the best interest of the Township and its residents.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Township Committee of the Township of Hardwick, County of Warren, State of New Jersey that the Mayor, Township Clerk, or any other duly authorized designee is authorized and directed to execute the subject Lease Agreement for the restoration, preservation, development, improvement, maintenance, operation and interpretation of the Vass Farmstead as a historic site with the State of New Jersey, Department of Environmental Protection, pursuant to the terms and conditions outlined in the subject Lease Agreement.

8. 2025-59 Resolution of the Township of Hardwick, County of Warren, State of New Jersey, Designating the Hardwick Township Historical Society as the Agent of the Municipality and creating a Vass Farmstead Ad-Hoc Committee, created to oversee the Maintenance and upkeep of the Property.

WHEREAS, the Township Committee of the Township of Hardwick is seeking to enter into a Lease Agreement with the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection for the restoration, preservation, development, improvement, maintenance, operation and interpretation of the Vass Farmstead as a historic site and making it available for public visitation and recreational uses; and

WHEREAS, the Township Committee further wishes to designate the Hardwick Township Historical Society (hereinafter “Historical Society” or “HTHS”) as the official agent of the municipality, responsible for the restoration, maintenance, improvement, and operation of the Vass Farmstead on behalf of the Township; and

WHEREAS, the Township Committee further wishes to establish an Ad-Hoc Committee, intended to assist with the maintenance of the Vass Farmstead; and

WHEREAS, the subject Ad-Hoc Committee shall be comprised of three members: one of whom shall be a member of the Hardwick Township Committee, one of whom shall be a member of the Hardwick Township Historical Society; and one, remaining, member, shall be a member of the general public; and

WHEREAS, there shall be no obligation for the Township Committee member and the Historical Society member to be different persons; and

WHEREAS, the Ad-Hoc Committee shall familiarize itself with the provisions of the Lease Agreement between the Township and the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection and shall operate within the confines thereof; and

WHEREAS, the subject Ad-Hoc Committee shall also perform all tasks assigned to it by the Hardwick Township Committee.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Township Committee of the Township of Hardwick, County of Warren, State of New Jersey, as follows:

1. That the Hardwick Township Historical Society is hereby designated as the official agent of the Municipality, responsible for the restoration, maintenance, improvement, and operation of the Vass Farmstead on behalf of the Township;
2. That an Ad-Hoc Committee is hereby created, designated to assist with the maintenance and operation of the Vass Farmstead, which shall be comprised of the following:
 - a. One member of the Hardwick Township Committee;
 - b. One member of the Hardwick Township Historical Society; and
 - c. One member from the general public.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the subject Ad-Hoc Committee shall be familiar with the terms and conditions of the Lease Agreement between the Township and the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection to better understand and assist with the maintenance of the Vass Farmstead.

9. 2025-60 Resolution of the Township of Hardwick, County of Warren, State of New Jersey, Adopting Floodplain Development Permit Application.

WHEREAS, the Township Committee of the Township of \Hardwick, County of Warren, State of New Jersey adopted the Floodplain Management Resolutions via Ordinance No. 2023-01, codified as Chapter 18 of the Hardwick Township Code; and

WHEREAS, as a requirement of the Ordinance the Township must adopt a Floodplain Development Permit Application to ensure that development in Riparian Zones, as described in N.J.A.C. 7:12 is performed with proper approval.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Township Committee of the Township of Hardwick, County of Warren, State of New Jersey that the Floodplain Development Permit Application attached hereto and made part hereof be and hereby is adopted in the furtherance of the Floodplain Management Regulations Ordinance, codified as Chapter 18 of the Code of the Township of Hardwick.

Motion made by Lovell, second by Meuse, and approved by roll call vote: Lovell—yes, Meuse—yes, Jacksic—yes for the August 20, 2025, Consent Agenda.

Township Attorney Bykov stated for the record that Resolution 2025-49 is being amended to

authorize the execution of a contract between the township and Appraisal Systems Incorporated for a complete revaluation of all real property for tax equalization purposes. The contract amount shall not exceed \$157,650, pending receipt of the actual contract document, which has not yet been provided to the committee.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

Website Update.

Scheduled to be up and running by the end of September.

Township Fee Schedule.

No update at this time.

Alina Lodge Meeting.

Mayor Jacksic reported on a recent meeting with representatives of Alina Lodge, including the new CEO. The representatives were well-prepared and credible, and the discussion provided greater clarity on the Lodge's current situation and project funding decisions. It was further noted that an open line of communication has been established, and a resolution for another agreement will likely be prepared in the future.

North Warren Court.

Township Attorney Bykov advised that any withdrawal would require approval from the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC), which presents a significant challenge as the courts are generally reluctant to allow municipalities to shift arrangements.

It was further noted that if withdrawal were pursued, practical issues may arise, including possible jurisdictional changes toward the western portion of the municipality, which could affect State Police coverage.

Township Attorney Bykov reported that entering into a new agreement would not require issuance of a Request for Proposals (RFP). Instead, the township would need to execute either a shared service agreement or an interlocal agreement. The committee acknowledged financial concerns but recognized that the primary obstacle remains obtaining AOC approval for withdrawal.

Health Benefits.

No update.

NEW BUSINESS:

Proposed Revision to Accessory Structure Setback Language - No Material Change.

Tabled to a later meeting.

CORRESPONDENCE:

1. July 23, 2025, Lisa Hibbs, Concord Energy Services
Subject: SWAEC-GEA Program Auction 8/20/2025-Update
2. July 25, 2025, Samtha Grape, Warren County Board of County Commissioners
Subject: Warren County Chapter of Lehigh Valley Chamber of Commerce
3. July 28, 2025, Tara Mezzanotte
Subject: From PennDOT 611 DWG Update- What is next
4. July 29, 2025, Donna Zilberfarb, Frelinghuysen Township Clerk
Subject: Notice of Ordinance 2025-06 Revising Section 403 of the Land Development Ordinance concerning Permitted uses in the VN-1 and VN-2 Zones on July 16, 2025

5. July 30, 2025, Tara Mezzanotte
Subject: Progress Update KEC-HTC-BTC Joint NJTPA TIP/LRTP Comment
6. August 1, 2025, Tara Mezzanotte
Subject: Comment for NJTPA draft LRTP & draft 2025-2028 TIP
7. August 5, 2025, Tara Mezzanotte
Subject: NJ State Senator Steinhardt, Assemblyman. DiMaio & Peterson sent support letter
8. August 7, 2025, Ryan Conclin, Director of Planning
Subject: Attested Copy and Resolution for Warren County Complete Streets Policy and Implementation Plan: Connect Warren
9. August 11, 2025, Michelle Zychowski, Field Representative from Tom Kean Jr.
Subject: Introduction
10. August 12, 2025, Sark K. Bennett, NJ Office of Planning Advocacy
Subject: Distribution of the State Plan Impact Assessment.
11. August 18, 2025, Joseph Zoltowski Director, Division of Plant Industry
Subject: 2025 LDD (Gypsy Moth) results-Hardwick Township

Township Attorney's Report:

Township Attorney Bykov reported that work is ongoing to revise the township fee schedule Ordinance. Attorney Bykov further noted that several resolutions were approved by the Committee this evening.

Attorney Bykov announced that the Vass Farmstead agreement has now been fully executed after nearly five years of negotiations, involving four different administrations. By resolution, the Hardwick Township Historical Society was designated as the municipal agent for the Boss House property, thereby eliminating the need for a sublease. Additionally, an ad hoc committee was created to oversee the maintenance and operation of the property. This committee shall include a representative of the Historical Society, a representative of the Township, and one member at large. The resolution is valid for one year, subject to amendment if deemed necessary. Attorney Bykov advised that the agreement requires State House approval, which is anticipated within the next two months.

TOWNSHIP CLERK:

Clerk Shipps reported that 25 boxes of old documents were disposed of last Friday. Clerk Shipps also reported that a residential shredding event has been scheduled for Friday, October 24, from 12:00 PM to 3:00 PM. A flyer will be prepared and distributed to inform the residents.

TOWNSHIP COMMITTEE REPORTS:

Committeeman Lovell Report:

- Volunteers Aaron Rosato, Bobby, Armin Socio, Denise, and Committee member Lovell worked to prepare the historic house for the Warren County Historic Trust Fund Conservancy grant visit.
- The house showed well, and county representatives were impressed.
- Thanks were extended to Rich Old for assisting with the presentation by providing historical background.

- The grant application focuses on window replacements, major painting, and minor repairs, with the priority of improving heating efficiency.
- Committeeman Lovell attended the Stillwater Fire Company's Long Term Fire event, which featured the new fire truck and participation from other North Jersey companies.
- He commended the Fire Company for hosting a successful and enjoyable community event.

Deputy Mayor Meuse Report:

- Blairstown responded to six calls during the past month, including a couple of fire alarms.
- She expressed concern regarding recurring motor vehicle accidents on the sharp corner near Mills and Sand Hill. A recent incident involved a driver swerving to avoid a bear and striking a pole.
- She recommended that larger or more reflective arrow signs be considered for installation at this location to improve roadway safety.
- She attended the Blue Star Mothers Motorcycle Poker Run at the Blairstown Fire Department, which was well attended by local fire personnel and community members.

Mayor Jacksic Report:

- Continuing discussions with Planet Network; awaiting final funding for underground work before project completion.
- Coordinating with John on planning for Hardwick Day; a flyer will be prepared to help promote a township-wide yard sale.
- Received positive community feedback on the Boss House property; residents noted it is being well-maintained and appreciated.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

No public comment.

ADJOURNMENT:

Lovell made a motion, seconded by Jacksic, and carried to adjourn the meeting at 8:15 pm.

Respectfully submitted by,

Kristin Shipps, RMC