

**MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE MAYOR AND COUNCIL
OF THE BOROUGH OF HOPATCONG
HELD THE MUNICIPAL BUILDING, 111 RIVER STYX RD, HOPATCONG NEW JERSEY
March 4, 2026
PUBLIC SESSION-7:30PM**

CALL TO ORDER

OPEN PUBLIC MEETINGS ACT STATEMENT: Mayor Galate stated, "This meeting is being held in compliance with the 1975 Open Public Meetings Act, NJSA 10:4-6 et seq., annual notice has been forwarded to the New Jersey Herald and the Daily Record, and posted on the bulletin board maintained in the Municipal building.

The council and attendees then stood for the Pledge of Allegiance, followed by a moment of silence in honor of soldiers lost in current conflicts.

ROLL CALL: Councilmember Bongiovanni, Councilmember Johnson, Council President Kucevic, Councilmember Rodriguez, Councilmember Taylor, and Mayor Marie Galate. Also present: Administrator Ron Tappan, Attorney Michael Lavery, Borough Engineer John Ruschke, and Municipal Clerk Shawna Jonach. Absent: Councilmember Falconi

PROCLAMATIONS – None

Mayor's address

The Mayor announced the second annual Sussex County Junior Sheriffs Academy scheduled for July 6 to July 10, 2026, open to Sussex County 6th–8th graders (2026–2027 school year). She also mentioned a recent senior center program hosted by the Rutgers Cooperative Extension. A pre-construction meeting was held with Tilcon for the 2023 grant paving project (Wills to Flora), which will not start until asphalt plants open around April 1, 2026. America 250 will be large one-day event planned for June 7, 2026, featuring a full day of activities and a fireworks display. Marty Kane has been approached to assist Hopatcong with its entry into a board competition. The Mayor also attended a Blue and Gold ceremony for Cub Scout Pack 88, and a North Jersey Highlands Regional Board meeting focused on strengthening local economies through parks and trails. She highlighted the value of Hopatcong's trail system for tourism. The Mayor also attended a winter summit which focused on economic revitalization. She acknowledged that significant redevelopment projects depend on future water and sewer infrastructure improvements. She reminded everyone that the mobile DMV unit will be in town on June 15, 2026, and that online registration is required and fills up quickly.

Mr. Bongiovanni

Provided a positive real estate update, announcing two more properties were up for auction. He added, "the other good news is that we've got twenty-two other properties added to the in rem list, generating some income for 2026."

Ms. Johnson

Municipal Alliance movie night and candy bingo for May 1, 2026. She made a plea for the "Girls on the Run" program for third, fourth, and fifth-grade girls, which needed more participants to run. She also listed several upcoming events: the Leap of the Lake on March 7; an Easter Egg Hunt at the Elks on March 28; a Tricky Tray hosted by the high school PTSO on May 21; and ongoing fundraising for the high school gym. Reporting on the Ordinance Committee, she noted that ordinances on peddlers' and solicitors' licenses were on the current agenda, and items like raising bingo/raffle fees, a "zombie" property ordinance, and a short-term rental ordinance would be on the next agenda. For the ambulance department, she noted volunteers are still needed and a CPR class would be held on March 5.

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Mr. Kucevic

Brief note on lake weather; request to keep soldiers serving overseas in their prayers.

Ms. Rodriguez

Shared that she had attended the Byram council meeting and congratulated their new councilperson. She highlighted the "America 250" bookmark design contest for K-8 students, with a deadline at the end of March. She also announced a women's health screening clinic offered by the Sussex County Division of Health on multiple dates in March, April, May, and June. She extended congratulations to the Hopatcong Warriors competition cheer teams for their third-place finish at Globals and promoted registration for spring soccer and Little League. Finally, she promoted the CERT program and a First Responder Mental Fitness and PTSD outreach event on March 19 at Hopatcong High School.

Mr. Taylor

Provided an update from the Environmental Commission. He announced that the town-wide cleanup and shred day is scheduled for April 25, 2026. On the same day, the commission will be giving away free seedlings.

ADMINISTRATOR'S REPORT

Business Administrator Ron Tappan began by acknowledging National Professional Women's Month. He then shared that he had been a guest speaker at a King's College master's degree government class, finding it "very refreshing to see younger people getting interested in local government." In response to a question from Ms. Johnson about the status of PFAS filtration, Mr. Tappan confirmed that we are below tolerance and zero detect... The Borough is in great shape.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Motion: Rodriguez Second: Kucevic

Vote: All Ayes

Dawn Roberts, resident, addressed the placement of the American flag in the room. It is leaning against the wall, which is against protocol for proper display and respect of the flag. Two solutions: move the flag to the ideal left-hand corner of the room, or "get a pole with brackets, bring it out from the wall a couple inches." Mayor Galate acknowledged her point and assured her the issue would be corrected.

Quashinna Williams, resident, approached the council to revisit a persistent issue regarding a grinder pump. Ms. Williams began by noting she had received a letter from an attorney, which, upon inspection, contained the same information she already possessed. She is looking for the serial number of the pump replaced in 2006. She also inquired about the redevelopment plan, specifically referencing properties on River Styx.

David Harris, resident, inquired about the Animal Ordinance.

Motion to close the meeting to the public: Rodriguez Second: Kucevic

Vote: All Ayes

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APPROVAL OF MINUTES

1. Approval of the February 18, 2026, regular/exec minutes (all eligible)

MOTION by Bongiovanni and seconded by Kucevic
ROLL CALL: Ayes- Bongiovanni, Johnson, Kucevic, Rodriguez, Taylor
Nayes- None Abstain:
5 in favor/0 opposed/ 0 abstentions - Passed

Correspondence

APPROVAL OF CONSENT AGENDA

All matters listed below are considered routine in nature and will be enacted by one motion. There will be no separate discussion of the items. If any discussion is desired, that particular item will be removed from the consent agenda and will be considered separately.

Reports

Tax Collector's Report –2025 Annual Report

Applications- n/a

Resolutions

- **2026-63**, Authorizing a second in rem foreclosure of Tax Sale Certificates.

Vote to pass Consent Agenda Items

MOTION by Bongiovanni and seconded by Taylor
ROLL CALL: Ayes- Bongiovanni, Johnson, Kucevic, Rodriguez, Taylor
Nayes- None Abstain:
5 in favor/0 opposed/ 0 abstentions - Passed

RESOLUTIONS

- 2026-64**, Authorizing Side Bar agreement between Borough of Hopatcong and Blue-Collar Employees of Union Council 196, I.F.P.T.E

MOTION by Bongiovanni and seconded by Taylor
ROLL CALL: Ayes- Bongiovanni, Johnson, Kucevic, Rodriguez, Taylor
Nayes- None Abstain:
5 in favor/0 opposed/ 0 abstentions - Passed

- 2026-65**, Authorizing a Grant Agreement between Hopatcong Borough and the Department of Environmental Protection.

MOTION by Bongiovanni and seconded by Rodriguez
ROLL CALL: Ayes- Bongiovanni, Falconi, Johnson, Kucevic, Rodriguez, Taylor
Nayes- None Abstain:
5 in favor/0 opposed/ 0 abstentions - Passed

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2026-66, Authorizing transfers between certain budget appropriations in the 2025 Current Fund budget pursuant to N.J.S.A 40A:4-58

Discussion: Ms. Rodriguez asked when the council will have a work session for the 2026 Budget. Mr. Tappan explained it will be when the budget is closer to completion.

MOTION by Taylor and seconded by Rodriguez
ROLL CALL: Ayes- Bongiovanni, Johnson, Kucevic, Rodriguez, Taylor
Nayes- None Abstain:
5 in favor/0 opposed/ 0 abstentions - Passed

2026-67, Approve refund of Tax Overpayment and cancel future taxes Block 11210 Lot 5

MOTION by Rodriguez and seconded by Johnson
ROLL CALL: Ayes- Bongiovanni, Johnson, Kucevic, Rodriguez, Taylor
Nayes- None Abstain:
5 in favor/0 opposed/ 0 abstentions - Passed

2026-68, Approve refund of Tax Overpayment and cancel future taxes Block 40102 Lot 30

MOTION by Bongiovanni and seconded by Rodriguez
ROLL CALL: Ayes- Bongiovanni, Johnson, Kucevic, Rodriguez, Taylor
Nayes- None Abstain:
5 in favor/0 opposed/ 0 abstentions - Passed

2026-69, Authorizing the Governing Body Operational Policy

Ms Rodriguez questioned why the council was not simply adopting the model resolution on decorum provided by the JIF (Joint Insurance Fund). Mr. Tappan explained the proposed policy was a combination of documents to create a "one stop shop." Ms. Johnson raised objections, stated she would be fine passing the JIF-recommended policy but had "a lot of reservations" about the additional language. Mr. Taylor defended the proposed policy, stating its language was sourced from New Jersey statutes and Robert's Rules, and urged the council to pass it and amend it later if issues arise. The borough attorney weighed in, explaining the rule is to handle a situation where someone is "out of order." He clarified, "The chair could not silence you if you were having your routine discussion amongst the council members on a topic. But if things got out of hand, that's the whole point of having somebody chair the meeting." He also confirmed adopting it as a resolution was appropriate and easier to amend later.

MOTION by Bongiovanni and seconded by Taylor
ROLL CALL: Ayes- Bongiovanni, Kucevic, Taylor
Nayes- Johnson, Rodriguez Abstain:
3 in favor/2 opposed/ 0 abstentions - Passed

2026-70, Opposing Legislation S-4736 Preempting Local Zoning

MOTION by Taylor and seconded by Bongiovanni
ROLL CALL: Ayes- Bongiovanni, Johnson, Kucevic, Rodriguez, Taylor
Nayes- None Abstain:
5 in favor/0 opposed/ 0 abstentions - Passed

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Bills List

The Mayor announced a new procedure for voting on it to create a clearer process. "When we vote on the bill list, you will either yes or no... And if you have something that you need to keep yourself exempt from, that's when you'll state it at that specific time." This was designed to prevent confusion from previous meetings.

2026-71, Approval of Bills List

except for PO's: 26-00473 (tabled until after Executive Session)

MOTION by Rodriguez and seconded by Johnson

ROLL CALL: Ayes- Bongiovanni, Johnson, Kucevic, Rodriguez, Taylor

Nayes- None Abstain:

5 in favor/0 opposed/ 0 abstentions - Passed

Approval of PO's: 26-00473 (held after executive session)

MOTION by Kucevic and seconded by Taylor

ROLL CALL: Ayes- Bongiovanni, Kucevic, Taylor

Nayes- Johnson Abstain: Rodriguez

3 in favor/1 opposed/ 1 abstentions - Passed

ORDINANCES

1. Ordinances

INTRODUCTION

- **4-2026, AN ORDINANCE OF THE BOROUGH OF HOPATCONG, COUNTY OF SUSSEX, STATE OF NEW JERSEY TO AMEND CHAPTER 129-3 OF THE BOROUGH CODE ENTITLED GAMES OF CHANCE: FEES AND CHAPTER 171 ENTITLED PEDDLING & SOLICITING, SECTION 171-6**

MOTION by Kucevic and seconded by Rodriguez

ROLL CALL: Ayes- Bongiovanni, Johnson, Kucevic, Rodriguez, Taylor

Nayes- None Abstain:

5 in favor/0 opposed/ 0 abstentions - Passed

- **5-2026, AN ORDINANCE OF THE BOROUGH OF HOPATCONG, COUNTY OF SUSSEX, AND STATE OF NEW JERSEY AMENDING THE BOROUGH CODE TO REVISE CHAPTER 13 ENTITLED COURT, JOINT MUNICIPAL. (Change of Names in the Joint Court)**

MOTION by Kucevic and seconded by Rodriguez

ROLL CALL: Ayes- Bongiovanni, Johnson, Kucevic, Rodriguez, Taylor

Nayes- None Abstain:

5 in favor/0 opposed/ 0 abstentions - Passed

- **6-2026, AN ORDINANCE OF THE BOROUGH OF HOPATCONG, COUNTY OF SUSSEX, STATE OF NEW JERSEY AUTHORIZING THE SALE OF A CERTAIN PROPERTY OWNED BY THE BOROUGH AND NOT REQUIRED FOR PUBLIC PURPOSES COMMONLY KNOWN AS BLOCK 40414 L 57**

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MOTION by Taylor and seconded by Rodriguez
ROLL CALL: Ayes- Bongiovanni, Johnson, Kucevic, Rodriguez, Taylor
Nayes- None Abstain:
5 in favor/0 opposed/ 0 abstentions - Passed

- **7-2026**, AN ORDINANCE OF THE BOROUGH OF HOPATCONG, COUNTY OF SUSSEX, STATE OF NEW JERSEY AUTHORIZING THE SALE OF A CERTAIN PROPERTY OWNED BY THE BOROUGH AND NOT REQUIRED FOR PUBLIC PURPOSES COMMONLY KNOWN AS BLOCK 41001 L 16

MOTION by Kucevic and seconded by Taylor
ROLL CALL: Ayes- Bongiovanni, Johnson, Kucevic, Rodriguez, Taylor
Nayes- None Abstain:
5 in favor/0 opposed/ 0 abstentions - Passed

FINAL HEARING -Roll call vote

- **2-2026**, AN ORDINANCE OF THE BOROUGH OF HOPATCONG, COUNTY OF SUSSEX, STATE OF NEW JERSEY AUTHORIZING THE SALE OF A CERTAIN PROPERTY OWNED BY THE BOROUGH AND NOT REQUIRED FOR PUBLIC PURPOSES AND MORE COMMONLY KNOWN AS BLOCK 40911, LOT 38

Motion to Open to the public by Rodriguez and seconded by Johnson Vote: All Ayes

- No comments from the public

Motion to close the meeting to the public: Rodriguez Second: Taylor Vote: All Ayes

MOTION to pass 2-2026 by Kucevic and seconded by Rodriguez
ROLL CALL: Ayes- Bongiovanni, Johnson, Kucevic, Rodriguez, Taylor
Nayes- None Abstain:
5 in favor/0 opposed/ 0 abstentions - Passed

- **3-2026**, AN ORDINANCE OF THE BOROUGH OF HOPATCONG, COUNTY OF SUSSEX, AND STATE OF NEW JERSEY AMENDING THE BOROUGH CODE TO REVISE CHAPTER 66 ENTITLED "ANIMALS

Motion to Open to the public by Rodriguez and seconded by Bongiovanni Vote: All Ayes

- David Harris asked if there could be more information given to the public on the Ordinance. The attorney briefly advised what it was. The Mayor directed him for future reference that copies of the Ordinances are posted in the hall, online and copies are available from the Clerk's Office. They are also in the agenda book at every public meeting.

Motion to close the meeting to the public: Rodriguez Second: Kucevic Vote: All Ayes

MOTION to pass 3-2026 by Rodriguez and seconded by Johnson
ROLL CALL: Ayes- Bongiovanni, Johnson, Kucevic, Rodriguez, Taylor
Nayes- None Abstain:

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5 in favor/0 opposed/ 0 abstentions - Passed

OLD BUSINESS

- **Cannabis:** The ordinance committee is tasked with drafting a preliminary ordinance based on prior work sessions. This topic will be placed on a future public meeting agenda for council discussion.
- **Local Government Week** – no updates at this time
- **Town Hall Hours** – Ms. Johnson explained the item remained on the agenda pending a public survey to gather data on whether there was a genuine public need for different hours. Mr. Tappan responded that he had not conducted a survey but also had not received complaints, emphasizing the staff's flexibility and that it may not be an option.
- **Live Streaming:** Mr. Tappan outlined the cost at "\$104.32 for the person to run a Zoom meeting for each session" and shared his professional concern that public presence could hinder the deliberative nature of work sessions. The tabled resolution on live streaming work sessions will be on the next agenda for a formal vote.
- **Losap:** Ms Rodriguez raised an outstanding issue: a missed interest payment for the LOSAP (Length of Service Award Program) from 2024. The missed LOSAP interest payment from 2024 will be calculated and added to a future meeting agenda for a council vote

NEW BUSINESS – none

PUBLIC SESSION

Motion: Kucevic Second: Rodriguez Vote: All ayes

Quashinna Williams suggested using high school interns or a webinar format to manage live streaming. The town attorney pointed out a legal complication with allowing comments via stream: they would be subject to OPRA requests.

Motion to close the meeting to the public: Kucevic Second: Rodriguez Vote: All Ayes

MAYOR'S CLOSING COMMENTS: Mayor made a note that on the Cannabis planner being new and he should not be held responsible for the delay. The mayor moved to go into Executive session for Attorney-Client Privilege and Litigation Resolution 2026-72, action may be taken.

MOTION by Rodriguez and seconded by Kucevic
ROLL CALL: Ayes- Bongiovanni, Johnson, Kucevic, Rodriguez, Taylor
Nayes- None Abstain:
5 in favor/0 opposed/ 0 abstentions - Passed

Public session reopened at 9:40

Vote was taken on the tabled bill 26-00473 (see Bills list)

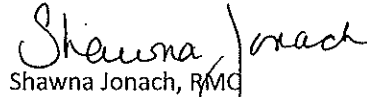
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ADJOURNMENT: Mayor Galate asked for a motion to adjourn.

Motion by Councilmember Taylor, Second by Councilmember Rodriguez. The vote was all ayes.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:42 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,


Shawna Jonach, RMC
Municipal Clerk