

REORGANIZATION MEETING – LAWRENCE TOWNSHIP COUNCIL
LAWRENCE TOWNSHIP MUNICIPAL BUILDING
COUNCIL MEETING ROOM

Thursday, January 1, 2026 – 12:00 Noon

The Reorganization Meeting of the Lawrence Township Council was held on Thursday, January 1, 2026, at the Lawrence Township Municipal Building – Council Meeting Room at 12:00 Noon.

The Municipal Clerk read the following statement of proper notice:

STATEMENT OF PROPER NOTICE: “Adequate notice of this Reorganization Meeting of the Lawrence Township Council, being held on Thursday, January 1, 2026, was forwarded to The Princeton Packet, The Times and The Trentonian on December 29, 2025 by the Municipal Clerk.”

The Municipal Clerk welcomed everyone and called the meeting of the Lawrence Township Council to order. She then extended a special thank you to the Lawrence Township Police Honor Guard for being present this afternoon.

The Municipal Clerk requested everyone rise, and stated that the Pledge of Allegiance will be led by the Lawrence Township Police Honor Guard.

The Municipal Clerk stated that Reverend Jeffrey A. Vamos, Pastor of Presbyterian Church of Lawrenceville, will give the Invocation.

The roll call for continuing Council members was then called as follows:

Present: Councilmembers Farmer and Perry.
Absent: None.

Also in attendance were Kevin P. Nerwinski, Esq. Municipal Manager, Arthur R. Sypek, Jr. Esq., Township Attorney, Christopher Longo, Deputy Municipal Manager, various Superior Officers of the Lawrence Township Police Department, Shirley K. Turner, New Jersey State Senator, Cathleen M. Lewis, Mercer County Commissioner, Paula Sollami Covello, Mercer County Clerk, and various county, state and neighboring dignitaries.

The Municipal Clerk stated, “It is my pleasure to announce the results of the November 4, 2025 General Election for the following members of Township Council for a four-year term. Please welcome.”

*Christopher Bobbitt
James S. Kownacki*

The Municipal Clerk stated, "It is also my pleasure to announce the results of the November 4, 2025 General Election for the following member of Township Council for a two-year unexpired term:"

Amanda Santos

The Municipal Clerk advised that the following individuals would be administering the Oath of Office to the (3) three elected officials.

- ❖ State Senator Shirley K. Turner administered the Oath of Office to Mr. Bobbitt.
- ❖ Municipal Manager Kevin P. Nerwinski administered the Oath of Office to Mr. Kownacki.
- ❖ Tracy Azinge, Esq. administered the Oath of Office to Ms. Santos.

The Municipal Clerk called for nominations for Office of Mayor for a two-year term ending December 31, 2027.

Ms. Amanda Santos nominated Christopher Bobbitt for the Office of Mayor, and Mr. Kownacki seconded the nomination.

The Municipal Clerk asked if there were any other nominations. There being none, Ms. Carter declared the nominations closed.

The Municipal Clerk asked Deputy Municipal Clerk Nicole Hillman to call the roll for the nomination of Christopher Bobbitt as Mayor.

Ms. Perry stated, "I abstain at this time. I no longer believe Council should elect the Mayor of our Town. I believe the Mayor should be elected by the citizens of Lawrence Township. This is long overdue. The residents of Lawrence should have the ability to vote for their mayor. My hopes and wishes for Lawrence Township in 2026 and beyond and moving forward would be that we have strong principles and trustworthy leaders who care for this community and serve without personal agenda. I wish that we continue to have dedicated leadership and support from our state senate and local assembly representatives. I wish that residents will challenge their local representatives in the county, and local democratic caucus, to stop being lukewarm, and demand accountability and integrity.

The privilege of serving as an elected official should not be a popularity contest, nor should it be used for a platform for bullying or cliques. My wish for 2026 and beyond is that this community would support the strong vision and commitment that our new Deputy Administrator has for our Fire, and Police Department. I hope that you will recognize our Town Manager, who remains focused on economic development, continued financial stability in our Town, and most importantly, serves our community with

clarity, transparency, and purpose. I hope that all the elected officials will continue to protect this wonderful Township, so that it may prosper and flourish as a place its residents are proud to live, can afford to live, and thriving business are drawn to this community.

Unfortunately, I will not be here to see this come to pass. It is with a heavy heart that I resign today. (Audible surprise from audience). I formally submit my resignation. I will no longer be in this community. I will always be watching and hoping that Lawrence Township remains a strong, shining beacon in Mercer County, one that upholds the spirit of the community, diversity, and democratic values for future generations. It has been an honor to serve you, and I regret that it was such a short time. I hope that you will remember that I always focused on listening, and that I valued collaboration, and I remain committed to doing what is right for our community, despite the backlash I received. I hope my successor will bring a renewed spirit of integrity and collaboration, with faithfully carrying forth the Council's mission of serving the residents of Lawrence with purpose, fairness, and vision. I wish only the best for this Council, and I know that you will do right by our community. Thank you." (Light applause).

After giving her speech, Ms. Perry left the Council Room and did not return.

RECORD OF VOTE

COUNCIL	AYE	NAY	PRESENT	ABSENT	ABSTAIN	MOVE	SECOND
Mr. Bobbitt	X						
Ms. Farmer	X						
Mr. Kownacki	X						X
Ms. Perry					X		
Ms. Santos	X					X	

The Municipal Clerk congratulated Mr. Bobbitt on his election as Mayor of Lawrence Township, followed by a sustained round of applause from the audience.

Ms. Farmer then requested a five-minute recess, and was informed by Mr. Nerwinski that she would need to make a motion for a recess.

On a motion by Councilwoman Farmer, seconded by Councilwoman Santos, the Lawrence Township Council Reorganization Meeting was recessed for five minutes.

Ayes: Councilmembers Bobbitt, Farmer, Kownacki and Santos.
 Nays: None.
 Absent: Ms. Perry
 Abstain: None.

The Municipal Clerk stated that a five-minute recess will now be taken.

After the recess, the Municipal Clerk called the meeting of the Lawrence Township Council back to order, and once again congratulated Mr. Bobbitt on his election as Mayor of Lawrence Township, followed by a robust round of applause from the audience.

Senator Shirley K. Turner administered the Oath of Office to Mayor Bobbitt.

Christopher Bobbitt's Mayoral remarks:

"A warm "good morning and Happy New Year" to all who are gathered here at the Lawrence Township Municipal building and online for this blustery first day of January. As I stand before you, I can't help but think what a difference two years makes. You might not know this, but at our last reorganization meeting, I was the youngest member of Council. Thank you, Councilwoman Santos, (Laughter) for joining Council and taking over that title.

Before I begin my remarks, I would like to say thank you to my colleagues on Council. To Councilman Kownacki and Councilwoman Santos, thank you for the conversations we had while knocking on doors and at various events during our campaign. I continue to be impressed with your dedication to our residents and your wisdom and values that help guide you and your decisions for our beloved community. To Councilwomen Farmer and Perry, thank you for your work over the past few years to address two challenging issues that our community faced, the Community Center and our fire service.

I'd like to wish a Happy New Year to our Township Manager, Mr. Nerwinski, our Township Clerk, Ms. Carter, and our Township Attorney, Mr. Sypek. In addition, I'd like to say Happy New Year to the Township staff that are in attendance today.

Thank you to Reverend Vamos for your invocation. Thank you to Mr. Nerwinski, Ms. Azinge, and our State Senator, Shirley Turner, for administering the oath of office to the three Councilmembers starting off their new terms. Thank you to the elected officials and other dignitaries in attendance. And, no, I'm not going to fall into the trap of acknowledging the elected by name only to forget a few of them, and hear about it later (Laughter). Thank you to the passionate residents in attendance who helped to reelect the three of us to serve Township Council. Thanks to our friends and family that support us during the joyful days like today, as well as the difficult ones; sometimes they happen in the same day (Laughter). And most importantly, a "thank you" to my wife, Tiffany, and my children, Frances and Henry, for supporting me and keeping me grounded. You remind me why this work is important.

I thought I'd start my remarks by quoting a fellow African American of mixed-race ancestry from Los Angeles, the late Congressman Augustus Hawkins. As a long-serving legislator, Rep. Hawkins served first in the California State Assembly before serving in Congress. He was a founding member of the Congressional Black Caucus, as well as

the author of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that codified equal employment opportunity for all Americans.

The Congressman once remarked that, "Leadership belongs not to the loudest, not to those who beat the drums or blow the trumpets, but to those who day in and day out, in all seasons, work for the practical realization of a better world—those who have the stamina to persist and remain dedicated." I share this quote because it states more clearly than I ever could, one of the fundamental principles as an elected official, to keep showing up engaged and willing to put in the effort to make positive changes for our community. I have spoken in the past about my toiling away in the lower-level meeting room of this building every second Tuesday of the month on a Township committee for nearly ten years before being elected to Council. That engagement and effort have continued over my decade of service on Council. My values and my love for Lawrence Township have guided me and will continue to guide me to strive to "carry out our work at this meeting in a just, and honorable and sincere manner, always bearing in mind our duties in continuing to keep Lawrence a wonderful community in which to live."

The Township Clerk, Ms. Carter, reads these lines at every meeting for our inspiration. For me, it's a moment where I bow my head, not in prayer, but as a way to clear my mind and focus on the meeting ahead. Today, I'm going to talk more about parts of the inspiration and share what these words mean to me.

I'll start with the phrase "carry out our work at this meeting." Each meeting of Township Council serves a few purposes. We will approve bids for work to occur with Township money. We create or amend laws through our Ordinances. Finally, with the Resolutions, we'll approve payments from Township accounts, accept grant money, hire consultants, to name a few items. We also use Resolutions to state our support for legislation at the state level or county level, or to make clear our values at the municipal level. That is the meaning of the work ethic of Council.

The next five words speak to the way we conduct ourselves as we do our work. We strive to act in a "just, honorable, and sincere manner." To me, that first word means that we all keep our residents in mind when thinking about a topic or issue. It's not only the loudest 24 people at the meeting, but the other 32,976 residents. It can be difficult at the moment, but our community is best served when we think of what's fair to all and not to just what two or three men are saying.

When we serve honorably as Councilmembers, we don't surprise each other, the Manager, Clerk, or staff at a meeting to embarrass or score points. Everyone on this dais, as well as Township staff, are part of one team: the Township of Lawrence. We can have disagreements, and even not like each other, but at the end of the day, we all had better have the interests of this Town at heart as we do our work. That's what the residents expect from us.

To be sincere is to put forth the effort to understand. Councilmembers should read the agenda items, speak to each other, as well as trusted friends and others in the

community, and use their own voices to guide them. Don't take shortcuts by either getting talking points from one person or taking what appears to be the easy way out. By understanding the issue as best you can, you can explain your decision to others. Even if a resident disagrees with your decision, they will at least understand that you were sincere about the process.

Over my years on Council, I have realized that at the municipal level much of what I do isn't about some of the hot button national issues of our time, although sometimes they overlap. When the Clerk says "our duties," I think of the basic health, safety, and welfare aspects of local government. I have gained broad Township support because I have recognized this truth. At the end of the day, we all share the same values of wanting to live in a safe community, that takes care of its roads and parks, and gives children, adults, and seniors a chance to be in community. Each one of us deserves to come home and be able to focus on our personal lives and not worry about the services that the Township provides. To paraphrase a friend, our duty is to be boring, by doing the work and delivering municipal services in a competent way, every day.

Finally, the phrase "keep Lawrence a wonderful community in which to live." As a resident, there is a reason I chose to live here and continue to be invested in this Town: the people. I can honestly state that my life has been enriched by the people that I have met during my time on Council. I continue to be impressed by the passion, character, and quality of our residents.

Including the word "keep" reminds me that there is much to be proud about what's come before us. From our community's long-standing diversity to our shared moments at parades, marches, memorials, and gatherings, we like to be together, eat, and celebrate our beloved community. That spirit of "E pluribus unum," or "out of many, one," is alive and well in Lawrence.

I admit I haven't touched on what to do with the Community Center, the future of the Fire Service, how to continue to improve the delivery of municipal services, or what to do with Trenton Water Works. I've spoken about them in the past and will continue to speak about these issues going forward. If you really want to have that policy itch scratched, find me afterwards and we can talk about it.

Instead, today, I really wanted to share a little bit of myself with you. As you saw two years ago, I can be emotional about serving on Council. I love our community and I take pride in serving on Council. It's an honor and privilege. I feel that if Council works together with the Manager, Clerk, and staff we can achieve meaningful and lasting changes that improve our lives and our Town.

I'll leave you with a quote from another African American of mixed-race ancestry, President Barack Obama. He once said, "One of the things that I've learned is that the big breakthroughs are typically the result of just a lot of grunt work. What is important is making sure that you've got an organization that has integrity, that is clear about its mission, that is doing things the right way and not taking shortcuts. That you're not

thinking in terms of short-term politics or PR, but you're in for the long haul, and when you do that, then ultimately, you're gonna get the good outcome."

I look forward to being the Mayor of Lawrence Township and working diligently with my colleagues on Council to get some good outcomes. Take care and Happy New Year! Thank you!" (Applause).

Resolutions

Resolution Nos. 1-53 were approved by the following roll call vote:

COUNCIL	AYE	NAY	PRESENT	ABSENT	ABSTAIN	MOVE	SECOND
Mr. Bobbitt	X						
Ms. Farmer	X					X	
Mr. Kownacki	X						
Ms. Perry				X			
Ms. Santos	X						X

All adopted Resolutions are spread in its entirety in the 2026 Resolution Book.

Public Participation

There was no public participation.

Mayor Bobbitt asked Council for their closing remarks:

Councilmember Farmer's remarks:

"Well, I'm not going to pretend I'm not a little shaken up by what happened here earlier, and I do want to recognize Councilwoman Perry. Obviously, she felt strongly about her convictions, and I'm very much saddened by what occurred here today, so I just, before anything else, wanted to make sure that I thank her for her work that she did do thus far with the Fire Study, and other initiatives that she thought were important to our community. So, I do want to recognize that.

As I ended 2025 last night, with a community bonfire, it is my love of this community, and as Mayor Bobbitt said, people coming together to celebrate our Town, and we like being with each other here in Lawrence. We have a lot of opportunities for that, so that is why I was honored to participate in the Hogmanay with the Lawrence Historical Society. And then this morning I kicked off my 2026 with a ribbon-cutting for a new business that is coming to Lawrence Township, a Latino restaurant, which I can only

tell you, as a little girl growing up in Lawrence, I never even imagined so many terrific options of diverse and multi-ethnic food.

You know, as I've often told, or as I've often shared, I'm the daughter of Theodore Buck Hendricks, who is a country boy from Palmer Springs, Virginia, and Angelina Hendricks, a visionary from Santurce, Puerto Rico, who taught their seven children the importance of God, family, and country and service. They raised us all to care about others, to be of service to our community, and to get an education. My husband, Rob, and my son, Andrew, have supported me these last two years, and allowed me to be there for my community and to do a lot of the things I so much love and enjoy. They sacrificed so that I could be of service to others. My siblings, who are always there to keep me grounded, and remind me of how our parents raised us by example, have always been my best role models.

I can't go by without not mentioning the centenarians that I got to know these past couple of years, and I want to particularly mention Mrs. Kahn, who recently passed at the age of 106. What a remarkable woman she was. I got to talk with her; I had no idea of all that she had done in her life, and she, as you all know, raised another remarkable woman, Lea Kahn, who is not here today I'm sure only because she is home tending to her family.

I have truly enjoyed being your Mayor for these last two years. It has been an honor for this little girl, who grew up on Drift Avenue, with love, secured by her God, and my early education at St. Ann School, who grew confident at her high school, Lawrence High School, always a cardinal, because this is who we are. I want to thank you, and God bless you, and I look forward to going onward to celebrate America's 250th birthday. Thank you." (Applause).

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**Councilmember Santos' remarks:**

*Thank you all for being here today, and Happy New Year. Being sworn in is not just a moment of ceremony, it's a commitment. I am grateful to my family, to my husband, Daniel, my son, Dorian, my daughter, Nina, and my son, Charlie, to our residents, and to everyone who has trusted me to serve.*

*I step into this role with an open mind, a listening ear, and a deep love for our community. Lawrence is a place where people care about one another, where ideas can become action, and where we all have a stake in what comes next.*

*I look forward to working collaboratively with my colleagues, with our staff, and with the residents to continue building a community that is equitable, that is vibrant, and forward-thinking. My promise is simple: to show up, to do the work with integrity, and to always remember who I serve.*

*Thank you, everyone. A special thank you to my running mates, James Kownacki and Christopher Bobbitt; it was a real pleasure getting to know you, and learning so much from the both of you. I'm excited for what we will accomplish next. Thank you!" (Applause).*

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**Councilmember Kownacki's remarks:**

*"Mayor Bobbitt, welcome back. I served with you for ten years, and in ten years I learned a lot from you. You guided this Township in the right direction always. We talked to everybody, and you gave them the response and answers they were looking for. So, I'm looking forward to the next four years being here working with you and whoever the next Mayor is going to be.*

*I thank my colleagues, Chris and Amanda; I enjoyed those walks and talks we had. I want to thank the Manager for the second time swearing me in as a Councilmember here; thank you.*

*And everybody out there, thank you for being here, Happy New Year, and I'm always a short-speaking person (Laughter), so, have a good day." (Applause).*

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**Mayor Bobbitt's Closing Comments:**

Mayor Bobbitt jokingly stated, "And that is why I let Councilman Kownacki go last; he brings us home pretty quickly." (Laughter).

He then stated, "Before I ask for adjournment, I just want to say the Colonel Hand March is coming up on Saturday, January 10<sup>th</sup> at 10:00 a.m., so hope to see you there; hopefully the weather is nice. And with that, thank you all for being here, it's going to be an interesting two years."

He then asked for a motion for adjournment. Ms. Farmer motioned, Ms. Santos seconded. All in favor.

There being no further business to come before Council, the meeting adjourned at 1:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by,

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Tonya D. Carter, Municipal Clerk

Attest:

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Christopher Bobbitt, Mayor