

**TOWNSHIP OF KNOWLTON
COUNTY OF WARREN, STATE OF NEW JERSEY
TOWNSHIP COMMITTEE MEETING
MEETING MINUTES
January 12, 2026**

CALL TO ORDER:

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 PM with the Salute to the Flag.
The meeting was held in compliance with the Open Public Meetings Act P.L. 1975, Chapter 231, with notice published in the New Jersey Herald and/or the Express Times Thursday, Warren County, NJ Zoned edition, and provided in the Municipal Clerk's office.
The meeting was recorded.

ROLL CALL:

Present: Deputy Mayor Baley, Committeeman Lembeck, Committeeman Mazza, Committeewoman Starrs, and Mayor Shipps. Also present were Municipal Clerk Shipps and Attorney St Angelo.

EXECUTIVE SESSION:

Motion made by Mayor Shipps, Second by Committeewoman Starrs and carried to go into Executive Session at 7:02 PM.

Resolution 2026-23 Authorizing Executive Session

WHEREAS, the Open Public Meetings Act; N.J.S.A. 10:4-6 et seq., declares it to be the public policy of the State to insure the right of citizens to have adequate advance notice of and the right to attend meetings of public bodies at which business affecting the public is discussed or acted upon; and

WHEREAS, the Open Public Meetings Act also recognized exceptions to the right of the public to attend portions of such meetings; and

WHEREAS, the Mayor and Township Committee find it necessary to conduct an executive session closed to the public as permitted by the N.J.S.A. 40:4-12; and

WHEREAS, the Mayor and Township Committee will reconvene in public session at the conclusion of the executive session;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Mayor and Township Committee of the Knowlton Township, County of Warren, State of New Jersey that they will conduct an executive session to discuss the following topic (s) as permitted by N.J.S.A. 40:4-12:

A. Personnel

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Mayor and Township Committee hereby declare that their discussion of the subject (s) identified above may be made public at a time when the Township Attorney advises them that the disclosure of the discussion will not detrimentally affect any right, interest or duty of the Township or any other entity with respect to said discussion.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Mayor and Township Committee, for the reasons set forth above, hereby declare that the public is excluded from the portion of the meeting during which the above discussion shall take place.

Motion made by Mayor Shipps, second by Committeeman Mazza and carried to close Executive Session at 7:22 PM.

PUBLIC COMMENT: Public comment limited to 20 minutes with a three-minute speaking time per member of the public.

Resident Dailbor Rubil raised concerns about the recent shooting regulations and the lack of prior notice for the December hearing.

Resident George Trongone inquired about the status of a vandalized commemorative bench at Tunnel Field. The Committee agreed to inspect the bench and coordinate repairs or replacements with DPW. Mr. Trongone also inquired about fiber and cable service availability. The Committee explained that Planet Networks is developing a deployment plan but requires demonstrated resident interest before extending service to new areas. Residents interested in service should register their address and zip code on the provider's website to show demand for their neighborhood.

Resident Joe Wenner raised concerns about slow response from JCP&L during power outages and the dangerous intersection situation where no one has a stop sign or yield sign. The Committee discussed the need for more aggressive tree clearing by JCP&L to prevent future outages and emphasized that upper-level decision-making is needed to address preventative measures, as line crews face significant challenges during storms. The Committee confirmed that a JCP&L representative will attend a future meeting to discuss tree removal policy, outage prioritization, feeder redundancy, and pole replacements. The Committee will request a list of streets with the most outages and information on storm-rated pole replacements.

DEPARTMENT REPORTS:

Tax Assessor - Rich Motyka

Rich Motyka reviewed 19 unsold township properties and discussed the possibility of another auction. Only a few properties are considered worth selling. The Committee discussed specific properties including those by the park and the boat launch. Mr. Motyka discussed the need for updated tax maps, which could cost up to \$200,000. Tax map digitization and corrections work continues with Laura Brill, with cost estimates to be provided to the Committee for planning and potential revaluation.

Knowlton Fire & Rescue

The Fire Department reported 221 incidents in 2025, including two structure fires and two motor vehicle accidents. The department provided updates on preventive maintenance activities. Discussion addressed the need for better access to Ferry Lane for emergency vehicle water access. DPW will assess the situation and propose short-term fixes such as plates or blocks, or plans for necessary improvements.

Department of Public Works

The DPW reported using 450 tons of salt for winter operations. Reports covered snow removal activities and equipment maintenance. The DPW discussed LED lighting upgrades for municipal buildings to save electricity costs. Documentation about the JCP&L/LED local government energy program and prior municipal energy-efficiency work will be distributed to DPW and

Committee members for review. The Committee discussed a broken fence at Tunnel Field requiring repair.

Explore Act and Gateway Communities

Tara Mezzanotte provided the Committee with an update on the Explore Act and the Delaware Water Gap area efforts to become a pilot program. Discussion covered the benefits of the Explore Act, including public-private partnerships and improved visitor experiences. The Committee discussed coordination with local congressmen to support the initiative and the potential for local tourism initiatives.

Environmental Commission

Michelle St. Andre reported that the Environmental Commission will hold its first meeting on January 20 at 6:30 PM. The primary objective is to establish the commission's ordinance, so the commission can be formally constituted as an official committee. Once the ordinance is approved, the commission will develop goals and objectives. The public is welcome to attend the meeting. A committee member offered to attend a related meeting on Friday morning to gather contact information and resources for distribution.

ORDINANCES:

Introduction:

2025-01 An Ordinance Amending Chapter 156, Article IV, Entitled "Soil Importation".

Motion made by Mayor Shipps, second by Committeewoman Starrs and carried to introduce ordinance 2025-01

Introduction:

2025-02 An Ordinance Regulating Short-Term Rentals (STRs), Establishing the Knowlton Township Short-Term Rental Program, Including an Annual Permit and Self-Certification System, Implementing Master Plan-Consistent Land-Use Standards, and Providing for Administration, Enforcement, Revocation, Appeal and Reapplication Limitations

The Committee discussed Ordinance 2025-02, establishing the Knowlton Township Short-Term Rental Program with an annual permit and self-certification system. The ordinance requires compliance with zoning laws, tax payment verification, maximum occupancy limits, safety certifications, and septic system standards. Enforcement is handled by the zoning officer with authority to investigate complaints and revoke permits for violations.

Committee members expressed concerns about enforcement challenges and potential impacts on residential neighborhoods, citing noise and parking issues.

The Committee agreed to table ordinance 2025-02 for a later meeting.

CONSENT AGENDA:

The following resolutions were approved on the Consent Agenda on roll call vote:

1. Resolution 2026-03: Approving Non-Compensated Appointments.

WHEREAS, it is necessary to appoint various persons to fill various positions on boards, committees and commissions and officers of the Township of Knowlton, as required by the various ordinances adopted in connection therewith:

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, by the Mayor and Committee of the Township of Knowlton, Warren County, New Jersey, on the sixth day of January 2026 that the following persons be appointed for terms as set forth:

Public Agency Compliance Officer	Kailene Pierson
Qualified Purchasing Agent	Christine Rolef

Knowlton Township Land Use Board

Matt Baley Class III member with a term expiring 12/31/2026 (1-year term)- Governing Body Appointment

Knowlton Township Liaison Appointment

NJDOT I-80 And PennDOT Route 611 Liaison	Tara Mezzanotte Chris Mezzanotte
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Transportation Liaison	Tara Mezzanotte Chris Mezzanotte
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2. Resolution 2026-24: Approving a Consent Order Granting the Township Conditional Compliance Certification of its Fourth Round Housing Element and Fair Share Plan.

WHEREAS, on March 20, 2024, Governor Murphy signed P.L.2024, c.2. into law, establishing a new framework for determining and enforcing municipalities’ affordable housing obligations under the New Jersey Supreme Court’s Mount Laurel doctrine and the New Jersey Fair Housing Act (the “FHA”) (N.J.S.A. 52:27D-301 et al.); and

WHEREAS, Knowlton Township (the “Township”) filed a Complaint for Declaratory Judgement, captioned IMO Knowlton Township, Docket No. WRN-L-52-25 on January 28, 2025 identifying its present and prospective fair share obligation for the Fourth Round as set forth above and committing to adopting and submitting a fourth round housing element and fair share plan as required by the FHA; and

WHEREAS, upon notice duly provided pursuant to N.J.S.A. 40:44D-13, the Knowlton Township Land Use Board (the “Board”) held a public hearing on the Fourth Round Housing Element and Fair Share Plan (the “HEFSP”) on June 24, 2025 and adopted the HEFSP on the same day; and

WHEREAS, FSHC filed a letter pursuant to N.J.S.A. 52:27D-304.1(f)(2)(b) regarding the Township’s HEFSP on August 29, 2025 seeking additional information and documentation before the HEFSP may be approved by the Program and trial court; and

WHEREAS, no other interested-party filed a challenge or any other communication; and

WHEREAS, the Township and FSHC have agreed to amicably resolve the issues set forth in FSHC’s letter referenced above through the Consent Order attached hereto, which if approved by the Court will result in a compliance certification for the Township for the Fourth Round; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, by the Mayor and Committee of Knowlton Township, Warren County, New Jersey, as follows:

1. That it authorizes and directs its professionals to execute and file with the Court the Consent Order in substantially the same form attached hereto.
2. That it authorizes and directs its professionals to take all actions to effectuate the terms of the Consent Order.
3. This Resolution shall take effect immediately.

3. Resolution 2026-25: Resolution to Join (Renew) the Fund.

WHEREAS, a number of local units have joined together to form the Statewide Insurance Fund (“FUND”), a joint insurance fund, as permitted by N.J.S.A. 40A:10-36, *et seq.*; and

WHEREAS, Knowlton Township (“LOCAL UNIT”) has complied with relevant law with regard to the acquisition of insurance; and

WHEREAS, the statutes and regulations governing the creation and operation of joint insurance funds contain elaborate restrictions and safeguards concerning the safe and efficient administration of such funds; and

WHEREAS, the LOCAL UNIT has determined that membership in the FUND is in the best interest of the LOCAL UNIT.

WHEREAS, the LOCAL UNIT agrees to be a member of the FUND for a period of three (3) years, effective from **January 1, 2026** terminating on **January 1, 2029** at 12:01 a.m. standard time; and

WHEREAS, the LOCAL UNIT has never defaulted on claims, if self-insured, and has not been canceled for non-payment of insurance premiums for two (2) years prior to the date of this Resolution.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the LOCAL UNIT does hereby agree to join the Statewide Insurance Fund; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that to the extent required by law, the Local Unit shall provide notice of the Indemnity and Trust Agreement to the Office of the State Comptroller; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the LOCAL UNIT will be afforded the following coverage(s):

Workers’ Compensation & Employer’s Liability
Comprehensive General Liability
Automobile Liability and Physical Damage

Public Officials and Employment Practices Liability
Pollution Liability
Property
Inland Marine Boiler and Machinery
Crime-Faithful Performance and Fidelity
Cyber Liability
Non Owned Aircraft

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that Debra Shipps (*name of ENTITY's elected official or employee*) is hereby appointed as the LOCAL UNIT's Fund Commissioner and is authorized to execute the application for membership and the accompanying certification on behalf of the LOCAL UNIT; and Kristin Shipps _ (second ENTITY employee) is hereby appointed as the LOCAL UNIT's Alternate Fund Commissioner.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the LOCAL UNIT's Fund Commissioner is authorized and directed to execute the Indemnity and Trust Agreement and such other documents signifying the membership in the FUND as required by the FUND's Bylaws and to deliver same to the Administrator of the FUND with the express reservation that said documents shall become effective only upon the LOCAL UNIT's admissions to the FUND following approval of the LOCAL UNIT by the FUND.

4. Resolution 2026-26: Authorizing Municipal Signatory to Holdover Term Notice for the Ramsaysburg Historic Homestead.

WHEREAS, the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) has operated the lease for the Ramsaysburg Homestead located at Block 57, Lot 20, in Knowlton Township for the past twenty years; and

WHEREAS, the original twenty-year lease agreement, dated May 31, 2006, expired on December 31, 2025; and

WHEREAS, the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection met with representatives of the Knowlton Township Committee and the Knowlton Historic Commission on December 15, 2025 and expressed their intention in person and in writing for the NJDEP's State Parks, Forests & Historic Sites to enter into a new lease with the Township, which will be subject to the issuance of a public notice of intent and State House Commission approval; and

WHEREAS, in accordance with Paragraph 43 of the original lease agreement, Knowlton Township is permitted to remain in possession of the leased premises as a holdover tenant while the public notice of intent and State House Commission approval for the new lease occurs; and

WHEREAS, maintaining Knowlton's status as a holdover tenant is needed to ensure continuity of insurance and security of the ongoing grants secured for Ramsaysburg site improvements; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the mayor and Committee of the Township of Knowlton, County of Warren, State of New Jersey, that the mayor is hereby authorized to sign the NJDEP's January 9, 2026, Holdover Term Notice.

5. Resolution 2026-27: Amending and Updating the Knowlton Township Personnel/Policy Manual.

WHEREAS, the Township of Knowlton seeks to update its Personnel Policies and Procedures Manual.

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

1. The Township of Knowlton Personnel / Policy Manual is updated in accordance with the attached exhibit (deletions noted in strikethrough ~~thus~~ and additions noted in underline thus) as follows:
 - a. Section 1, "Biometric Time Clock Policy" is deleted in its entirety and replaced with "Electronic Timeclock with Geofencing Policy";
 - b. Section 1, "Clothing Allowance (DPW Employees Only)" is added.
2. The Clerk and Township Attorney may update the table of contents accordingly after adoption of the update Manual.
3. A copy of the updated Township of Knowlton Personnel / Policy Manual shall be on file with the Clerk's office.
4. A copy of this Resolution and updated policies shall be distributed to all Township employees.
5. This Resolution shall take effect immediately.
6. Resolution 2026-28: Appointing Vincent Gaeta as Emergency Management Coordinator and Travis Christie as Deputy Emergency Management Coordinator for Knowlton Township.

WHEREAS, the Township of Knowlton requires the appointment of an Emergency Management Coordinator pursuant to N.J.S.A. App. A:9-40 et seq.; and

WHEREAS, the Township Committee of the Township of Knowlton has determined that it is in the best interest of the Township to appoint Vince Gaeta to serve as the Emergency Management Coordinator; and

WHEREAS, the Township further desires to appoint Travis Christine to serve as Deputy Emergency Management Coordinator to assist the Coordinator in fulfilling the duties of the Office of Emergency Management; and

WHEREAS, both appointments shall be for three-year terms in accordance with applicable statutory requirements; and

WHEREAS, said appointments shall take effect January 1, 2026.

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

1. Vince Gaeta is hereby appointed as Emergency Management Coordinator for a three-year term commencing January 1, 2026 and expiring December 31, 2028.
2. Travis Christine is hereby appointed as Deputy Emergency Management Coordinator for a three-year term commencing January 1, 2026 and expiring December 31, 2028.
3. A certified copy of this Resolution shall be provided to the Warren County Office of Emergency Management and any other agencies as required by law.

7. Resolution 2026-29: Approving Compensated Appointments.

WHEREAS, it is necessary to appoint various persons to fill the numerous positions of authority in the Township of Knowlton for the year 2026.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, by the Mayor and Committee of the Township of Knowlton, Warren County, New Jersey, that the following appointments be made with terms being until December 31, 2026:

Recreation Director

Dennis Lembeck

Clean Community Supervisor

Dennis Lembeck

Motion made by Committeeman Mazza, second by Deputy Mayor Baley and approved by roll call vote: Baley—yes, Lembeck—yes, Mazza—yes, Starrs—yes, Shipps—yes, Consent Agenda Items 1-3, 5-7.

Committeewoman Starrs presented Resolution 2026-26 authorizing a holdover agreement for the Ramsaysburg Historic Homestead. The lease with DEP expired December 31, 2025, and a holdover agreement is needed while a new lease is processed. The Historic Commission has secured approximately \$800,000 in grants for property improvements that would be jeopardized without the agreement. The Township's insurance requirements are adequate.

Motion made by Deputy Mayor Baley, second by Mayor Shipps and carried to approve 2026-26.

MAYOR'S LAND USE BOARD APPOINTMENTS:

Mayor Shipps made the following Land Use Board appointments:

James Mazza: 1-year term, expiring on 12/31/2026, Class I

Rene Mathez: 1-year term, expiring on 12/31/2026, Class II

Nancy O'Neill: 4-year term, expiring on 12/31/2029, Class IV
Vince Gaeta: 4-year term, expiring on 12/31/2029, Class IV
Tom Drake: 2-year term, expiring on 12/31/2027, Alternate #1

UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

Brake Retarders Sign Request:

Tara Mezzanotte reported ongoing resident complaints regarding truck brake noise on Routes 46 and 94 through the Villages of Delaware, Columbia, and Hainesburg. A noise-limitation ordinance is being researched as a possible remedy. Tabled until a further meeting.

Seasonal Snowplow Drivers:

The Committee discussed and approved moving forward with a part-time seasonal snowplow driver application received from Mike Rose.

GPS Systems-DPW Vehicles:

Clerk Shipps reported that she surveyed Warren County municipalities regarding GPS tracking systems in DPW vehicles. Most municipalities using GPS utilize Verizon-based systems. She will follow up with obtaining quotes for a future meeting.

NEW BUSINESS:

Meeting Room Chairs. The Committee discussed the need to replace broken meeting room chairs. Clerk Shipps noted that purchases must go through a vendor with a voucher system (e.g., National Business Services, Staples Advantage, or WB Mason).

FEMA Quarterly Reporting Requirement. Mayor Shipps raised a FEMA communication requiring mandatory quarterly reporting. Township Attorney St. Angelo clarified that these reports are typically handled by the Township's OEM Coordinator. Newly appointed OEM Coordinator Vince Gaeta was introduced and will coordinate.

Streetlights. The Committee assigned streets for members to inspect for functioning streetlights, emphasizing the need to verify the lights' necessity and functionality. Committee members will collect pole numbers and photos and compile a complete report for potential service adjustments or cancellations.

Municipal Magazine Subscription. The Committee discussed the monthly municipality magazine subscription. After discussion, the Committee determined it would discontinue the subscription.

Age-Friendly Grant for Senior Programs. Committeewoman Starrs discussed the Age-Friendly grants program for municipal organizations and nonprofits, focusing on senior programs. Examples of previous grant recipients and their projects were discussed, including senior fitness and wellness programs and transportation services. The Committee discussed potential uses of grant funds for senior activities, such as Tunnel Field improvements and transportation services. A resident offered to assist with the grant application and coordination with the Division of Aging.

CORRESPONDENCE:

The following correspondence was acknowledged:

January 6, 2025, from Samantha Grape, Confidential Assistant, Warren County Board of County Commissioners, Subject: Commissioner Kern Cover Letter - Data Centers.

January 8, 2026, from Tara Mezzanotte, Subject: DOI RFI 10.2025 Package.

January 3, 2026, from the Department of Consumer Affairs, Subject: FY2026 School Regionalization Efficiency Program (SREP) Grant Announcement.

TOWNSHIP COMMITTEE REPORTS:

Deputy Mayor Baley:

DPW No additional updates beyond DPW report.

Fire & Rescue: Meeting with Chief Travis scheduled for Wednesday.

Personnel: Employee meeting in planning; awaiting outstanding items.

Board of Education: New school board President is Allison Steele; Vice President is Ron Ritz.

Finance and Recreation: No updates.

Committeeman Lembeck:

No updates at this time; meetings are upcoming.

Committeeman Mazza

Wastewater update pending to be reported at the February meeting.

No further updates.

Committeewoman Starrs

Communications: Took over as primary Nixle contact; added website administrative access for timely updates.

Utilities: JCP&L representative scheduled for February 9 meeting to discuss feeder redundancy, storm-rated poles, outage street data, and tree removal authorization.

Grants: Identified the NJ Department of Human Services Age-Friendly Grant Program (no match required) as a potential funding source for senior programming and transportation; proposed forming a resident subcommittee to identify needs. Also following up with Lori Cheslow at the county level regarding Optimum broadband coverage gaps in the Township.

Mayor Shipps

Finance: Meeting to be scheduled with the CFO, Deputy Mayor, and Township Auditor to address audit and budget.

Insurance: Health premiums increased approximately 35%; re-quote not possible for six months due to census requirements.

PUBLIC COMMENT- AGENDA ITEMS ONLY:

Pam Rusweiller commented that brake retarder signage will not be effective without enforcement and cautioned against spending money on signs that cannot be enforced. She also recommended requesting State Police presence at the February JCP&L meeting given the difficult atmosphere at the prior meeting.

Tom Drake thanked the Committee for its support in passing the Historic Commission mitigation grant resolution and requested confirmation that three signed copies have been mailed to the grant authority as required. Clerk Shipps responded yes.

Bob McNinch noted that the county already provides strong senior services at the Lions' Club, including daily programs and lunches, and that the Township has an active senior club. He recommended that before pursuing any senior-related grants, the Committee first assesses what services are already in place and build upon them rather than duplicate existing efforts.

ADJOURNMENT:

Motion made by Committeewoman Starrs, second by Deputy Mayor Baley and carried to adjourn the meeting at 9:35 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Kristin Shipps,
Municipal Clerk
Township of Knowlton