Knowlton Township Land Use Board
Minutes
Tuesday, August 25, 2026

The regular meeting of the Knowlton Township Land Use Board was held on Tuesday, August 25, 2026. Chairman Taylor led the Board in the flag salute at 7:00 p.m. He announced that adequate notice of the meeting has been provided in compliance with the "Open Public Meetings Act" (as amended by Public Law 2025, chapter 72) notice of this meeting and the agenda were posted on Knowlton Township's official website and on the bulletin board at the Municipal Building. A moment of silence was held for our Military Personnel serving in harm's way.

Roll call:

Present: Baley, Gaeta, Mathez, Mazza, O'Neill, Overpeck, Smith, Drake, Mezzanotte and Taylor.

Absent: Allen

Also Present: Attorney Gavan, Engineer Keenan

Approval of Minutes:

The May 26, 2026 minutes were distributed prior to the meeting for review. A Motion was made by Mr. Mathez and seconded by Mr. Drake. Mr. Mathez noted the minutes on the resolution of adoption for 15 Simpson Road Project were missing what the resolution did. It should be noting the project was incomplete. With the correction noted motions stayed. Roll call vote approving the minutes as corrected: Baley – abstain, Gaeta – yes, Mathez – yes, Mazza- yes, O'Neill – yes, Overpeck – abstain, Smith – abstain, Drake – yes, Mezzanotte – yes, Taylor – yes.

It was decided and agreed upon to hear the agenda items prior to the executive session. The application was heard first.

Old Business:

#26-003 George Burdge, Block 65, Lot 2.15

Ms. Laura Brill was sworn in and gave her credentials as a licensed land surveyor and professional planner. Attorney Gavan gave an overview of where we were with this application. The accessory structure they wish to add was in what was called a "conservation easement" on their deed. The applicant has since gone to the township committee who in Resolution 2026-94 vacated any blockage to the garage addition. Ms. Brill then went over the application. It is a little over 3-acre lot, located at 55 Auble Rd. The conservation easement was created in 1987 before the wetlands law came into effect. There is a tree area that is not to their benefit. The proposed garage is in front of the house. That is the main variance they are asking for. It is 40 feet from the property line and due to the height, it would have to be over 60 feet and that would put it in the driveway. So they are asking for a variance for the proposed garage to be in front of the house and be closer to the sideline. Reasons include the shape of the lot, the house is in the back of the lot, and the driveway goes up the middle of the lot. The proposed garage location is ideal because it is relatively level and will need very little excavation or change to the environment. It rises up rapidly by the paved area by the house.

As far as detriment to the public, it is barely seen driving down the road due to the conservation easement treed area. It is several hundred feet of natural buffer. She showed where the nearest neighbors were and what was visible were their garages. So, this would be consistent with the neighborhood. This would blend in and not be a detriment to the public.

Engineer Nusser then went through his completeness review dated April 7, 2026. Three pieces of relief were required. Minimum side yard setback for accessory structures. This is calculated at the principal plus 2 feet for every bit of height. This would push it more towards the middle of the lot. On this property it would be awkward to have it directly in front of the house. It's not permitted to be in the front yard only because the lot is less than 4 acres in size. The ordinances otherwise allow it. He feels the testimony heard regarding the location of the house is something to consider because that is going to drive where you can put an accessory garage on the lot. It must be located within the building envelope, so it is within the side yard which is the same relief as the side yard setback.

There were three general comments: To provide some testimony regarding the uses. For the record he believes the garage has a second story. A space that is accessible. So testimony regarding what is the purpose of it and that it is not going to be used as habitable space. Testimony was given on item #2. The third item was the conservation easement, but that item was satisfied by the township committee's action.

Mr. George Burdge was then sworn in to testify. Chairman Taylor asked if it was a full second story. It is not; it is an attic area. The peak comes down and he will finish off a 16x30 piece for a general storage, workshop type area. Attorney Gavan asked regarding a workshop, can you stand up in there? You can. It will have electricity; it will not have plumbing. So, it is not habitable space.

The meeting was open to public comment for either Ms. Brill or the applicant. With no comment, public portion was closed.

Questions/comments from the board: Mr. Mathez noted the size of the existing garage that is attached to the house is 744 square feet. This proposed garage is very big, almost 800 square feet, why do you need the second garage? Mr. Burdge said he was making it larger because of the size of his extended cab pickup truck. It doesn't fit well in the other 24-foot-deep garage. The new garage will be 28 feet deep so he can pull the truck into it and be able to walk around it. Essentially this will be used for storage of cars. Mr. Mathez then spoke regarding the investigation our township attorney did on the conservation easement. The attorney had noted that there were some deed restrictions on the deed that might be relevant to this. Attorney Gavan said he reviewed the deed restrictions, he does not believe they are relevant at all. That was a deed restriction from the original developer, which was designed, in his reading, to have some control over the type of original house. So, they were not underbuilt or overbuilt. But there were no restrictions for this application. Mr. Mathez said what he read said the lots were limited to a house and a garage. Attorney Gavan said he interpreted it as what they were required to have, not that they were limited to have. Engineer Nusser read deed restrictions that were listed on the plat. Item 5 read: the purchasers agree to erect a one-family home containing a basement and a garage. In addition will erect a minimum of 22 hundred square feet of living space on one story, 22 hundred square feet on one and a half stories, 22 hundred square feet on 2 stories. Containing a minimum of 3 bedrooms and an attached 2 car garage which shall not face the street unless approved by the developer.

Item one read: no building shall be erected, altered or used on any lot for any purpose other than a single-family dwelling together with other structures incident to an accessory to said dwelling. No structures other than a completed residence for which a certificate of occupancy has been obtained shall be occupied. Mr. Nusser said accessory structures are being permitted but it was trying to make sure when people were building the houses that they did have the garage on there. Attorney Gavan understood that wasn't any condition of approval, it was the developer's condition. It wasn't the approval of this board or the town. This would be the private developer's deed restriction.

There were no other questions from the board members. Chairman Taylor asked if there was a motion on the 3 variances (2 overlap). They are the front yard, the side yard and not being in the building envelope. Motion to approve was made by Mr. Mazza, the motion was seconded by Mr. Baley. Roll call vote: Baley – yes, Gaeta – yes, Mathez – yes, Mazza – yes, O'Neill – yes, Overpeck – yes, Smith – abstain, Drake – yes, Mezzanotte – yes, Taylor – yes.

Determination of Completeness:

#26-004 Allentown SMSA Limited Partnership d/b/a Verizon Wireless and Cellco Partnership d/b/a Verizon Wireless, Block 64, Lot 1.02

Engineer Nusser went over his review dated July 21, 2026. This application is for a cell tower; the tower is located in Hope Township and was approved in Hope. Their driveway is in Knowlton and goes through to Honey Run Road. They are coming in for an interpretation and in the alternative, minor site plan approval along with use variance relief. The driveway is in a residential zone that doesn't permit the commercial use. A commercial driveway requires site plan approval. Even though the driveway is already there, it's not being used as a commercial driveway now. It must be evaluated to the proper standards. IE: emergency vehicle access. His completeness review lists a number of things they are recommending waivers for but there are 3 items which they outlined that are needed. Item #7 ownership disclosure for the applicant's entity. Item #22 there is not a current survey for the property. There is a survey for the piece in Hope, but not this piece in Knowlton. Item #23 a plan documenting compliance with the driveway standards. So we can do the evaluation and see if they need any relief. He is recommending the application be deemed incomplete. It cannot be evaluated as submitted.

Chairman Taylor asked the board if anyone had a problem with the items that were recommended for waivers for completeness purposes only. Engineer Nusser made a notation that item #5 certification of taxes paid was received so that is satisfied. Mr. Mazza had questions regarding the history of this application. Chairman Taylor noted that Hope Township made our approval a condition of their approval. Attorney Gavan added we will not be challenging the cell tower. We will just be concerned with the driveway meeting the required standards. Chairman Taylor clarified the waiver items are for completeness only, they always can come up during the hearing and testimony and be asked for. Mr. Smith made a motion to recommend the project be deemed incomplete based on the engineer's letter dated July 21, 2026. Chairman Taylor noted the item numbers 7, 22 and 23. Motion was seconded by Mr. O'Neill. Roll call vote: Baley – yes, Gaeta – yes, Mathez – yes, Mazza – yes, O'Neill – yes, Overpeck – yes, Smith – yes, Drake – yes, Mezzanotte – yes, Taylor – yes.

#23-004 Quiet Valley Printing/Deroche, Block 12, Lots 7, 8 and 9

Engineer Nusser went over his completeness review dated Aug 21, 2026. This was an update from last year's review dated Dec 1, 2025, for the site plan. That review included the recommendation of deeming the application complete. He noted a discussion point of the carbonate rock, but the discussion didn't take place because the applicant wanted to update some things and come back. The application was then deemed incomplete, and the resolution was adopted at the January meeting. Since then, they have received their wetlands LOI and they completed a phase 1 and limited phase 2 geologic investigation on the property for the carbonate rock. So, this no longer would require a waiver. There are several waivers needed on this August review, but the recommendation of completeness continues. The requirement of hooking up to the sewer service area is no longer necessary as the township committee adopted a resolution granting them the waiver to be able to put in a septic system.

Mr. Smith questioned engineer Nusser on item #3 on the review dated Aug 21. It says the consent of owner and affidavit of ownership. However, the owner of record is Quiet Valley Printing, is that correct on our application? Due to the length of time since seeing the application, engineer Nusser was not sure. Mr. Smith noted the recent packet received with the geologic report says Quiet Valley Products. The DEP report says prepared for Deroche Truck Covers & Tarps, Inc. He asked Mr. Nusser if we do have the consent of owner and the affidavits of ownership. It seems now there are 3 companies involved here. Attorney Gavan noted we would need to look at the application; we do not have a copy here. It could be discussed when they give testimony. Mr. Mazza also noted different names that were used. Attorney Gavan said we went through this in 2023 we will make them testify as to what it is under oath, so we know exactly what is going on. If you feel it's not there and think it's material you can deem it incomplete. Ms. Mezzanotte spoke regarding the use being previously approved by the Board of Adjustment. This use as presented in their plans was not approved. Attorney Gavan advised that will have to be brought up at the hearing, this is for completeness only. Chairman Taylor asked Mr. Smith if he was not satisfied that we have a true consent of ownership. That is Mr. Smith's opinion. Attorney Gavan suggested that it be deemed complete, subject to them supplying the information prior to the hearing. Everyone agreed with that solution. Mr. Mazza then questioned the latest report, calling it a proposed industrial building. Engineer Nusser noted that they hired a new engineering firm and possibly they are not being careful with the wording. He concurs with Attorney Gavan that when they come in, they will have to explain how they continue to comply with the approval they were granted for the use variance. There is more to do than just get a site plan approval. They still have to show that continuing compliance and still meeting the negative criteria.

With no other questions, Chairman Taylor asked if there was a motion deeming completeness and that will be with the condition that they provide a clear consent of ownership. Motion was made by Mr. Smith. Motion was seconded by Mr. Gaeta.
Roll call vote: Baley – yes, Gaeta – yes, Mathez -yes, Mazza – yes, O'Neill – yes, Overpeck – yes, Smith – yes, Drake – yes, Mezzanotte – yes, Taylor – yes

New Business:

#ZB21-002 Belvidere NJ Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses, Block 68, Lot 10.01 Request for another additional extension of their approval

The last extension was for a year which expired August 2, 2026. This request did not list a specific period of time. Chairman Taylor asked how long we can keep doing this. Attorney Gavan noted as long as the ordinances don't change. Their letter did state hardship reasons. Mr. Mathez noted he believes it is because it is a county road and has experienced problems also. Engineer Nusser concurred he has also. Chairman Taylor noted they did not request a time period, does anyone want to suggest one. Engineer Nusser said the ordinance stipulates you can grant them in years. A year at a time. The only downside to this is if the ordinance does change, they will lose their approval. Engineer Nusser clarified the extension could be dated as of today, rather than when the last expired. Chairman Taylor asked if there was a motion to grant the extension one year from today. Motion was made by Mr. Mathez and seconded by Mr. Gaeta. Roll call vote: Baley – yes, Gaeta – yes, Mathez – yes, Mazza – yes, O'Neill – yes, Overpeck – yes, Smith – yes, Drake – yes, Mezzanotte – yes, Taylor – yes.

Public Comment:

The public comment section was opened. With no public comments, public portion was closed.

Executive Session:

WHEREAS, Section 8 of the Open Public Meetings Act, Chapter 231, P.L. 1975 permits the exclusion of the public from a meeting in certain circumstances; and
WHEREAS, this public body is of the opinion that such circumstances presently exist;
NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Land Use Board of the Township of Knowlton, Warren County, State of New Jersey, as follows:

1. The public shall be excluded from discussion of and action upon the hereinafter specified subject matter.
2. The general nature of the subject matter to be discussed is as follows: Personnel
3. It is anticipated that the minutes of this executive session will be disclosed to the public when the need for confidentiality no longer exists. Action may be taken after the executive session
4. This Resolution shall take effect immediately.

Date adopted: August 25, 2026

A motion to move into executive session to discuss matters of personnel at 7:45 p.m. was made by Mr. Smith and seconded by Mr. Baley. In a voice vote all were in favor with no opposition or abstentions. Chairman Taylor asked everyone who is not a board member or the secretary to leave the room. The board came out of Executive Session with a motion made by Mr. Mathez and seconded by Mr. Gaeta and returned to open (public) session at 8:25 p.m.

Chairman Taylor asked if there was a motion to hire an attorney for the remainder of this year. There were two applications, Mark Blount and Joseph Tauriello. Mr. Baley made the motion to hire Mark Blount. Motion was seconded by Mr. Smith. Roll call vote: Baley – yes, Gaeta – yes, Mathez – yes, Mazza – yes, O'Neill – yes, Overpeck – yes, Smith – yes, Drake – yes, Mezzanotte – yes, Taylor – yes.

Approval of Bills:

Chairman Taylor asked if everyone had a chance to look over the bills. Ms. O'Neill made a motion to approve payment of the bills. Motion was seconded by Mr. Drake. With no discussion on the bills, in a roll call vote: Baley – yes, Gaeta – yes, Mathez – yes, Mazza – yes, O'Neill – yes, Overpeck – yes, Smith – yes, Drake – yes, Mezzanotte – yes, Taylor – yes.

Mr. Drake questioned the status of the ongoing litigation and a list of settlement options that were supposed to be submitted. When our insurance company attorney presented at the meeting, he suggested that we offer a settlement. Discussion took place about whether that was rejected or not. Chairman Taylor believed the offer was submitted but not accepted and they are going on with the suit. There are motions being presented to the judge and counter motions. He believes this will not be a jury trial; it will be heard by the judge. He believes everyone is being copied on the updates.

Other Business;

Billings Deeds Recordings

Chairman Taylor spoke regarding the paperwork that was submitted from the Warren County Clerk's office. It was nothing to worry about. Years ago, Joyce Billings came in for a sub-division on Hainesburg River Road. It was approved and we have the resolution. Through signed deeds the tax maps are altered, and tax bills are presented. All that was done but apparently the deeds were never filed with the county properly. They were just filed recently, and this was from 2004. The question was if it had any effect on us and our attorney confirmed it has none. This was a legitimate sub-division, it is on our tax maps, and they get their tax bills.

Adjournment:

A motion to adjourn was made by Mr. Baley and seconded by Mr. Mazza. In a voice vote all were in favor. The meeting was adjourned at 8:40 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted:

Doreen Apgar,
Board Secretary