

**MAYOR AND COUNCIL
REGULAR MINUTES
December 9, 2025
7:00 P.M.**

CALL TO ORDER

SALUTE TO COLORS

Mayor Wronko invited all those present to stand in a salute to the colors.

MAYOR'S STATEMENT AS TO COMPLIANCE WITH P.L. 1975

Adequate Notice of this Meeting has been provided according to the Open Public Meetings Act, Assembly Bill 1030. Notice of this Meeting was included in the Annual Meeting Notice sent to the New Jersey Herald and the Daily Record on January 8, 2025, and was placed on the Official Bulletin Board in the Municipal Building.

In the event the Mayor and Council have not addressed all items on this Agenda by 10:00 PM and they are of the opinion that they cannot complete the Agenda in a reasonable time period, the Mayor and Council may exercise their option to continue this meeting at an agreed to date, time and place. Please turn off all cell phones for the duration of this Meeting.

ROLL CALL

Council Members:

Councilman Riccardi – present
Councilman Romano – present
Councilman Simpson – present

Councilman Thornton – present
Councilman Wachterhauser – present
Councilman Zampino – present

Mayor Wronko – present

PRESENTATIONS

Raymond Sarinelli, Sr., Borough Auditor – Raymond Sarinelli, Sr. introduced himself for the newer members of the council and explained that he was the Borough Auditor for approximately 40 years before the current Borough Auditor, Raymond Sarinelli, Jr. took over. Raymond Sarinelli, Jr. had another meeting this evening and could not attend this meeting. The projected budget currently has a projected increase of a little under 5%, which is a little bit shocking. But there are certain drivers that everyone is dealing with this year. Health insurance is one of the big items. The NJ State Health Benefit Plan is increasing 26%. The Borough is looking at a 17% increase in health insurance costs. The police salary and wage increase is approximately \$50,000. There is the special emergency for the reval which was passed last year, and the first payment is due on that, which is almost \$50,000. The Capital Improvement Fund has increased by \$50,000. These four items make up the majority of the increase. As always, the Borough's budget is scrutinized, and every line item is held very tight. Things in Stanhope have not changed in that every penny that is being spent is evaluated. The Borough is very frugal with spending, and this has paid off. In years when other municipalities are having increases much larger than what Stanhope is projecting, Stanhope is able to balance things out with some of the other good decisions that have been made along the way. While this is not a great position right now from a taxpayer standpoint, all things considered, the Borough is in the best position possible. In the sewer utility, expenses are going up faster than what was projected in the rate study. A rate study was done last year and there was a 10% increase in the sewer rates last year with a projected rate over the next three years at 7 ½% and a couple years at 5%. Mr. Sarinelli stated he is of the opinion that the Borough will not get by with these percentages on the sewer side due to the increases with the Musconetcong Sewerage Authority (MSA) sewer costs. The MSA is facing the same issues with health insurance, and those costs get passed along to the Borough. The water utility seems to be stable. The rate increase study that was done last year is adequate for what is going to happen with the water utility. The Borough is on a rotating debt service plan in which the Borough tries to pay off all the existing debt within the ten year note period. The Borough is in a good position to continue that process. The interest cost is a little lower. Some of the capital is being funded as we go along which puts less strain on the debt service. The budget

plan is usually to have the budget finalized sometime in January or at least by February. There is usually a March deadline. The budget would be introduced in March and then adopted in April or May. Mr. Sarinelli stated he does not see anything which should hold up that schedule. The sooner the capital plan is finalized, the easier it is for bids to be put out. The later the bids go out seems to cause them to cost more because there is added competition from other municipalities and other work. If there are capital plans to be accomplished this year, the sooner the proposals can be obtained and the ordinances adopted will be beneficial. Mr. Sarinelli stated he has been semi-retired for the last six years and it is nice to see that things are still in good shape with the Borough and being run economically and close to the vest.

Mayor Wronko and the Council thanked Mr. Sarinelli for attending this evening's meeting.

Jason Laliker, Borough Tax Assessor – Jason Laliker, Borough Tax Assessor, stated he has no printed reports this evening due to the fact that some of the final numbers for the year have not been finalized as yet. The overall valuation for this year and what the coming year will look like are not determined yet. The ratable base is most likely going to double because of the reval and bringing everyone up to market value. This will cause the tax rate to drop. The preliminary values are being reviewed, and letters are being prepared to send out to the property owners after the holidays. Sending the letters in January means there is not as much chance of them getting lost in among the holiday mail and there will be plenty of time to hold hearings with the taxpayers. In terms of 2025, the added assessments were typical this year. The ratable base was increased by just under \$900,000. There were two County Tax Board appeals. Next year the Borough will get more appeals. Typically, during a reval, if the property owner does not react to the letter they receive soon enough, they will file an appeal. At that time inspections can be done and any information that needs to be corrected will be done. In regard to the reval, all the inspections have been completed. Approximately 71% of the properties were inspected. Pre-covid these numbers used to be much higher at like 85% - 90%. The State wants the appraisers to access at least 50% now. Having over 70% shows that the taxpayers complied with process. Nobody likes it, it is not a popular process, but the taxpayers were compliant with it, which is good. This helps to obtain accurate values for all the properties.

The last reval took place in 2012. Mr. Laliker stated he was not working here then, but at that time and in previous years, when the value letters were sent out, all the residents would get is what the projected assessment would be for the next year. When people looked at the letter they would try to figure out if they were to sell their house, is that what they would get for it. However, their tax amount might increase or decrease, and they would not know until the third quarter of the next year. This was problematic, especially if you were receiving an increase. The letters going out in January will have the 2026 projected assessment and the taxpayers will have the opportunity to come in and talk with the company here in the Borough. An estimate will be provided for the 2026 taxes, but it will not include any budget increases from the school, county or municipality. The letter will clearly state that. This will give people an idea of what their 2025 taxes were and what the 2026 taxes will be without the budget increases. If someone is unhappy with an increase, they will have the opportunity to meet with Appraisal Systems here at Borough Hall to discuss the matter. If they are unhappy with the results of that meeting, they can file an appeal. Last time that was a problem because the tax bills went out after the appeal deadline and people thought they had no options. The new process has worked well and provides transparency. The letters will have a link to the website where the taxpayer can go. There will be a spreadsheet with all the sales listed that have been used to come up with the values. There will be a list of all the assessments listed by street. Appointments will be made online.

Mr. Laliker stated the Borough was ordered by the County Tax Board to do the reval. In October Mr. Laliker stated he attended a meeting, and all the municipalities are going to have to do a reval due to how crazy the market has been. The companies that do the revals are so busy that it is good that Stanhope has gotten this done now. Administrator McNeilly stated the conversation about doing this reval began back in 2020 based on Mr. Laliker's concerns and the politics of it. Thought went in to choosing the right time. Mr. Laliker stated the Tax Board decided in 2021 to hold off because the market was taking off. It has been a few years now and the market trend is lasting. All the municipalities are facing this expense now. Administrator McNeilly asked Mr. Laliker how long this reval will hold. Mr. Laliker stated it is hard to determine. The market is still very strong. There are municipalities that are choosing to do annual revals as opposed to doing this every ten years. It does work well in big towns with big commercial bases and a lot of sales. Stanhope had 60 sales in 2025 to look at and that was a decent number. A decision does not have to be made right away to do an annual assessment. This can be decided in a year from

now. If 2026 looks crazy and the values are dropping too fast, Mr. Laliker stated he will inform the governing body, and a decision can be made at that time. Mr. Laliker stated he is of the opinion that the figures will hold for quite a few years. But it is impossible to know what the market will do over the next several years. It doesn't affect Stanhope much, but the residential is still very strong, but the commercial market is starting to see the retail and specialty office space starting to flatten out. Cap rates went up slightly on those this year, so the values are coming down a bit. Industrial and apartments are very strong. Administrator McNeilly stated ideally, we would like this to hold for at least ten years. Mr. Laliker agreed and stated he will try to get the numbers in a good spot so the numbers will hold and the market will stabilize.

Administrator McNeilly stated the prior Tax Assessor conducted a compliance reval in house due to the cost of a sale that occurred with a one-bedroom condominium appeal. Compliance reviews are no longer an option. Mr. Laliker stated the Tax Board has started scheduling revals out to 2030. The municipalities that were just done in 2017, 2018, or 2019 are going to be right back in the loop because the market has been so crazy. Mr. Laliker stated he does not recommend doing an annual reval due to the small size of the Borough. Councilman Riccardi asked when will the meetings be held for the residents to meet with the appraisers. Mr. Laliker stated the letters will be going out in early January and then the meetings will be scheduled to take place in the council chambers starting in January. Two hearings could be held at the same time here and if another facility is needed that will be arranged. The deadline to complete the hearings is February 15th. Councilman Riccardi stated that information will have to be over communicated to the taxpayers. Mr. Laliker stated if any questions are brought to the governing body, they should direct those people to contact him or call and schedule a hearing to go over the assessment. Appointments will be available in person or on the phone and if an inspection is needed that can be done in person or virtually. The residents will be accommodated in every way possible. The deadline for appeals will be pushed back this year to May 1st, which will also be beneficial. Administrator McNeilly stated that Mr. Laliker has a very good approach for the transparency that everyone wants. Mr. Laliker stated, in the event that someone is away for the month of January and February and they come home and read the letter, there will be time to file an appeal before May 1st. Councilman Wachterhauser asked Mr. Laliker to let Administrator McNeilly know when the letters will be going out so that a Nixle message could be sent to let people know to watch for the letter. Discussion took place regarding the importance of posting and sending messages to inform the public about the appraisal letters being mailed out. If someone does not receive a letter, Mr. Laliker can be contacted, and he will see that the taxpayer gets a copy. Councilman Thornton asked what the penalty is if someone did not let the appraiser into their home. Mr. Laliker stated no one is penalized. Those properties will receive an estimate. If there is an appeal, the County Tax Board is going to ask if an inspection was done. If the inspection was not done, the Board will want to schedule an inspection to take place. If that is refused, the Board will not be inclined to give a reduction. If a case should go to the State level, the State Board would ask the same question.

Mayor Wronko and the Council thanked Mr. Laliker for attending this evening's meeting.

Capital Program Update – Eric Keller, Borough Engineer, gave an update on the Capital Program. All the paving has been completed and the process went smoothly. There were just a few minor issues. The striping was done. Mr. Keller stated next year will be easier when Denville Line Painting will be the vendor for the co-op again. The contractor for the sidewalks finally got to town and was able to complete that job last week. The weather was not ideal for pouring concrete, but if any of it fails or chips, they will come back to fix it. It is too cold now for the crosswalk work to be done. The crosswalks are striped, but the nice finish material will be done in the spring. The only project on the schedule for next year is the Local Aid Grant for New Street. Councilman Wachterhauser asked that potential traffic calming options be considered for New Street. Mr. Keller stated the traffic calming options will be folded into the design evaluation. At a minimum, what exists now will be put back in place. The need for anything additional will be evaluated. Mr. Keller will present his finding, and a discussion will take place with the governing body at that time. Mr. Keller stated the milling and paving will be done by one contractor, but they will not do the speed humps. Another contractor will have to be brought in for the speed hump installation because the speed humps are not part of the co-op contract. Councilman Thornton asked for a Municipal Infrastructure Meeting to be held, prior to the presentation being made to the council. Mr. Keller confirmed this can be done after the proposal for the work is authorized. The only issue to discuss will be the speed humps. The rest of the job will entail milling down two inches and paving. The striping will be replaced in the same locations. The milling machine goes right through and removes the existing speed humps.

Eric Keller, Stormwater Management Training – Eric Keller, Borough Engineer, stated he is here this evening to provide the annual Stormwater Management Training, and he distributed information to the governing body and the Administrator. Mr. Keller stated stormwater is important here in New Jersey and in other parts of the country. This is driven by the Federal Government through the Clean Water Act. The DEP is continuing to modify, tweak and redefine the stormwater rules. There is a rule for climate resiliency and in August they issued a notice that there would only be substantive changes. So, they pulled it back. Now the word is that this will be introduced and placed on the New Jersey register in January. The primary focus is on stormwater, but it also touches on wetlands, flood hazards and anything that goes back to stormwater. The rules that were adopted in 2023, where they raised the flood elevation two feet, was for rivers like the Musconetcong. One of the things which was changed was a coastal issue, which does not affect us up here in Sussex County, is that they went from a sea level rise of 5 feet to 4.4 feet. The Borough operates under a Municipal Stormwater Program Tier A, and we have done so since day one. This has all types of requirements as far as complying with maintaining stormwater systems. The Borough has done Outflow Mapping and two years ago a grant was received to do Stormwater Structure Mapping. Every year an annual report is prepared and submitted which includes items such as development activity, most years the Borough has none. Any stormwater related ordinances which need to be adopted are listed, which still needs to be finalized for this year. The stormwater ordinances need to be updated to incorporate the 2023 rules. This only applies to commercial developments and all of the Borough's commercial developments are less than an acre in size, so we have not had the issue. The residential developments, like the one proposed for Sparta Avenue, are governed by Residential Site Improvement Standards, which incorporate the latest state stormwater regulations. The report also includes educational activities, mapping and maintenance of facilities. All of the basins in Stanhope, except for one, are municipally owned. This is why after every quarter and after every major storm, a member of Mr. Keller's staff checks all of the basins. They work with the DPW Superintendent to keep them operating in accordance with the standards. Administrator McNeilly stated the one basin not owned by the Borough is owned by the gas station on Route 206. Mr. Keller stated that the owner is finally doing his inspections. Mr. Keller stated he will email the link for the Municipal Excess Liability Joint Insurance Fund link to the governing body. Mr. Keller stated he has provided the governing body with some important handouts regarding stormwater. The fall leaves are an issue. Residents are asked not to rake the leaves into the road, and the leaves definitely should never be raked on top of an inlet. The leaves can clog storm sewers and then that causes problems.

Mr. Keller asked the governing body if they had any questions regarding stormwater. Councilman Riccardi asked if the existing basins will be in compliance with the new rules? Mr. Keller stated they already exist as they are and were designed as required at that time. The one update that was done was to develop an operations and maintenance manual which was not a requirement until the early two thousands. There is an operations and maintenance manual for all of the Borough's facilities which was prepared by Mr. Keller's office. This is what is used to perform the inspections. The sediment debris at the outlet structures is looked at. A number of years ago, some of the outlet structures did not have trench tracks. Several years ago, on Maple Terrace there was a resident who went to clean out the storm sewer culvert in his yard, and he got sucked into the pipe. That does not happen if there is a trench track on the outlet structures. Mr. Keller stated he had worked with Jason Titsworth, DPW Superintendent, to get them all installed so that all the structures are protected. During a storm, the water is being sucked through that hole in the outlet structure and if someone were to be in or near the detention basin and they slip and fall, at least now, with the bars across it they cannot go through. Councilman Riccardi asked if there is a requirement to bring the existing basins up to the new rules. Mr. Keller replied that the existing basins do not need to be changed. Administrator McNeilly stated years ago when neighborhoods were designed, basins were created in someone's backyard, and they were responsible for the upkeep. Mr. Keller stated the rules have changed and an individual homeowner cannot be responsible for anything that serves more than one lot, unless it is for their lot only. Any basins which will be created for the development on Sparta Road will be privately owned and they will be managed by the Homeowner's Association. Under the terms of the Tier A Permit, they will be required to do their quarterly inspections, annual report and inspect and report after major storms, which are all reported to the Municipal Engineer. Those reports are then incorporated into the Borough's Annual Report which is then submitted to the DEP. Mayor Wronko thanked Mr. Keller for his presentation.

CITIZEN'S TO BE HEARD

Mayor Wronko opened the meeting to the public after advising attendees that there is a five (5) minute time limit for each speaker.

Carmen Pico asked if the speed humps on New Street can be made higher when they are reinstalled in order to slow drivers down. Mayor Wronko stated the Borough Engineer will do an analysis prior to the road being repaved. Mr. Pico also suggested that the speed humps be placed closer together to keep people from going too fast in between the speed humps. Mr. Keller stated there are a number of factors that have to be looked at regarding the placement of speed humps. They cannot be placed where there is an inlet or someone's driveway. Mr. Pico stated there was also discussion in the past about possibly installing additional stop signs. Mr. Keller stated there are regulations as to where stop signs can be placed. Mr. Pico stated there are approximately ten children under the age of ten, and he is concerned about their safety. Mayor Wronko stated when Mr. Keller does his analysis, all safety concerns will be addressed. Mr. Pico stated there are 8-9 streetlights which are burned out along Main Street. Councilman Wachterhauser stated the street light issue will be discussed a little later on during this meeting.

Rosemarie Maio stated in the past two weeks there have been three or four near misses at the intersection of Maple Terrace and Sagamore Road with electric bikes. This is largely because the kids go through without slowing down and the cars do not stop and the kids are not wearing helmets all the time. Ms. Maio asked if there are regulations. Mayor Wronko stated he has witnessed similar situations and suggested the Police Department be consulted. Administrator McNeilly suggested asking the Police Department to attend the work session in January to discuss the issue. Councilman Wachterhauser stated there are laws for e-bikes and there are different classifications for the e-bikes based on the speed and the power. Ms. Maio stated perhaps the parents should be cited. Councilman Wachterhauser stated unless an officer is there when it is happening no one will be cited. Councilman Wachterhauser suggested gathering information to inform the public. Parents are ultimately responsible for their child and if they are giving them a bicycle that can go 25mph, they should be aware of the potential risks. Ms. Maio stated the other day she pulled off Brooklyn Road onto Maple Terrace, and two kids came up Maple Terrace and crossed Brooklyn Road, and they rode on either side of her car as she was travelling up a blind hill. Those kids did not seem to be affected at all. Councilman Wachterhauser stated there is very little the municipality can do and the responsibility does fall back upon the parents. Any person under the age of 13 is supposed to wear a helmet. Parents need to enforce the rules. Councilman Thornton stated anyone on an ATV would receive a ticket. Councilman Wachterhauser stated any gas motor has to be registered in order to be on the road. Administrator McNeilly stated as a driver it is a scary position to be in. Mayor Wronko asked to have this topic discussed at the work session. Councilman Riccardi stated the state currently has a bill under consideration for licensing of e-bikes.

Seeing no one further from the public wishing to speak, Mayor Wronko closed the public portion of the meeting.

MINUTES FOR APPROVAL

Mayor Wronko read aloud the list of minutes being presented for approval:

November 25, 2025 Business Meeting

On motion by Councilman Simpson, seconded by Councilman Wachterhauser and carried by a majority voice vote, the minutes were approved. Councilman Romano and Councilman Riccardi abstained from the minutes of November 25th.

CORRESPONDENCE *(List Attached)*

On motion by Councilman Romano, seconded by Councilman Riccardi and unanimously carried by voice vote, the list of correspondence was accepted and ordered placed on file.

COUNCIL COMMITTEE REPORTS

Public Safety – Councilman Wachterhauser/Councilman Riccardi

(Police, Fire, Ambulance, Court & Violations Bureau, Emergency Management)

Councilman Wachterhauser stated the Police Department for the month of November had 310 calls for service, 118 of those calls were motor vehicle stops.

Councilman Wachterhauser stated no report was received from the Fire Department this month.

Councilman Wachterhauser stated the Ambulance Corps submitted three monthly reports. For the month of September there were 14 calls in Stanhope, 25 in Netcong, 4 out of town and 3 standbys. They treated 23 patients and made 16 trips to the hospital. The squad travelled 486 miles and had 188 hours and 42 minutes of volunteer time. For the month of October there were 22 calls in Stanhope, 25 calls in Netcong, 4 out-of-town calls and 4 standbys and an assist from the Netcong Fire Department. They treated 28 patients and made 20 trips to the hospital. The squad travelled 635 miles and had 245 hours and 54 minutes of volunteer time. For the month of November there were 14 calls in Stanhope, 28 calls in Netcong and 2 out of town calls. They treated 28 patients and made 17 trips to the hospital. They travelled 515 miles and had 184 hours and 58 minutes of volunteer time.

Councilman Wachterhauser stated the Sussex County Fire Marshal for the month of November reported that 14 inspections were completed.

Councilman Wachterhauser stated Code Enforcement for the month of November reported that two notices of violation were issued. One abandoned house registration was received. There were three re-inspections for previous violations that have been rectified.

Councilman Wachterhauser stated on December 5th he and Councilman Riccardi met with the Ambulance Squad Captain Kuncken, two Lieutenants, and their President. Several items were discussed at that time. There will be a 75th anniversary celebration, potentially in September. More information will be forthcoming. Looking forward over the next few years, an ambulance was purchased in 2013. The last time it was replaced there was a 15-year service life on the ambulance. That ambulance was re-chassied and the actual box is 30 years old. In the next two years, this issue will have to be looked at along with Netcong to possibly replace the ambulance or provide funds to replace it. The squad would like to obtain power stretchers in the future as opposed to the manual stretchers that are used now. This will help with patient lifts into the back of the ambulance which requires a great deal of effort and would prevent injuries to the members. The power stretchers range in price from \$30,000 to \$45,000, which includes the stretcher and the equipment that is installed in the back of the ambulance which pulls in the stretcher and powers it. When the new ambulance is quoted, this item will be included in the purchase. The Ambulance Squad asked to have the signs on Linden Avenue updated. Councilman Wachterhauser stated this issue was discussed at a previous council meeting this past year. Currently, the signs say ambulance parking only. The request is to change the signs to read parking for ambulance squad members.

Councilman Wachterhauser stated a meeting was held previously with the Fire Department and in reviewing his notes the “Quint”, which is the ladder truck, is running on 23-24 years old. This vehicle is coming to the end of its service life and is something that will have to be addressed in the future. This, along with an ambulance, are expensive pieces of equipment that will need to be replaced. There is a bill in the Assembly that EMS will potentially be a mandated service that municipalities will have to provide, similar to police and fire.

Councilman Wachterhauser stated the Chief of Police received a letter from an individual who received lifesaving services. Councilman Wachterhauser read the letter aloud as follows: Dear Chief Pittigher, I am writing to express my deepest gratitude to the officers and EMT’s who responded to the Stanhope United Methodist Church on October 25, 2025. The quick action, professionalism, and dedication quite literally saved my life. Through their immediate response, performing CPR, and using the defibrillator, they gave me a chance to continue living. Words cannot fully capture the appreciation I feel for the extraordinary efforts they made that day. I am

profoundly thankful for their courage, skill, and commitment to protecting and serving your community. I will forever remember the role your officers played in giving me a second chance at life. With heartfelt thanks, Paul Kalleberg, Ret. D/C Morris County Prosecutor's Office. Councilman Wachterhauser stated Officer Corey Kunzer was the officer on duty that day who responded along with the EMT's from the Stanhope-Netcong Ambulance Corp.

Administrator McNeilly asked if there is a date when the equipment needs to be replaced. Councilman Riccardi replied before 2028. Councilman Wachterhauser stated the ambulance was purchased in 2013 and with a 15-year service life that brings the date to 2028. Councilman Wachterhauser stated he does not have the date written down but the service life of that type of fire truck is probably 25-30 years and the current truck age is at 23-24 years which would bring the date to 2030 or 2031. The longer we wait the more expensive things will get to be. Administrator McNeilly stated the ambulance cannot be bonded because the Borough does not own it. The fire truck would be bonded. Administrator McNeilly stated a ladder truck would probably cost around one million dollars. Councilman Wachterhauser stated the cost of an ambulance would range anywhere from \$150,000 to \$250,000 depending on the options chosen. A ladder fire truck like the one the Fire Department has now with an integrated pump could run a million dollars or higher. Administrator McNeilly stated in looking at the future wish list, a million-dollar purchase does not fit anywhere. However, with the current list it would work better in 2031 for the fire truck and the ambulance would be better for 2029. Councilman Romano stated the ambulance cost is split between two municipalities. Councilman Wachterhauser stated Captain Kuncken will be meeting with Netcong Borough in early January to go over these issues as well. Councilman Wachterhauser stated he asked Captain Kuncken to provide the Netcong committee with his and Councilman Riccardi's contact information so they can begin to start this conversation. Councilman Wachterhauser stated, if legislation moves forward requiring EMS to be a mandated public service, he does not know how all this will fall. There is not enough information regarding that at this time. Administrator McNeilly stated the last time the ambulance was purchased it cost each municipality around \$50,000-\$60,000. The box that is currently in use has served us well, but it cannot be reused. At a minimum, each town would be looking at \$75,000 each. Administrator McNeilly stated he does not know how a million-dollar truck will fit into the BANs. This will have to be figured out. Councilman Romano stated the majority of the ambulance calls do not take place in Stanhope. Councilman Riccardi and Councilman Wachterhauser stated that issue was brought up during their meeting and now there will be three more residential developments being built in Netcong.

Councilman Wachterhauser stated he has not met with the Police Department as yet. The Police Chief has submitted his retirement letter which is effective for the end of this year. Mayor Wronko stated there is time to plan for this change. Ellen Horak, Borough Clerk, stated the Police Chief's letter is in the governing body's Friday correspondence which will be distributed at the end of the week. At this time, not everyone on the council has received the retirement letter.

Finance & Administration – Councilman Romano/Councilman Thornton

Councilman Romano stated the tax collections for the month of November totaled \$2,733,428.33 and the year-to-date amount is \$13,990,314.38. The Borough is as steady as a rock on the collections. In the first three quarters, over 98% of the taxes have been collected. For the fourth quarter the collections are just under 95% and overall, for the year the rate is 97.67%. There are no problems with collection and the numbers are consistent.

Councilman Romano stated the water collections for the month of November are \$13,166.69 and the year-to-date amount is \$597,849.07. The water and sewer collection total for November is \$30,664.89 and the year-to-date total is \$1,403,689.11. Councilman Romano stated he serves on the MSA board and there are going to be increases down the line for sewer costs. The MSA is experiencing the same problems as everyone else. The MSA did adopt a policy last year which is contingent into this year in order to not hit the municipalities with a big increase in one year. This year's increase will be just slightly below 5%. No one knows what the issues with PFAS are going to cost. There is also the possibility that we may have to go to another plant at some time. Currently, we are in good shape.

Community Development – Councilman Zampino/Councilman Simpson

Councilman Zampino stated he had no report this evening.

Municipal Infrastructure – Councilman Thornton/Councilman Romano

(Water Distribution, Sewer Collection System, Road Construction & Maintenance, Buildings & Grounds)

Councilman Thornton stated he had no report this evening.

Information Technology – Councilman Riccardi/Councilman Wachterhauser

Councilman Riccardi stated earlier today he sent out reports generated from DeskPro to give everyone a view of what we are seeing come in. A monthly report and the previous month's report will be available at all times. This is automatically updated and can be viewed by clicking on the link which has been provided to the governing body. To date, 7 tickets have been created and 4 have been resolved. Future reports will give response times from open to close.

Councilman Thornton stated he is aware this is a work in progress and asked if the governing body will be able to see any of the ticket content. Councilman Riccardi stated the Mayor does have access due to the fact some items coming in specifically request information for the Mayor. If anything arises that would require changes, that will be evaluated at that time. Councilman Thornton stated he appreciates all the work that has gone into putting this program in place. The reason for the program being put in place was due to a resident's concern back in 2024 because her emails were not being responded to. The governing body members, over the years, have voiced concerns about not being aware of the complaints when they are approached by residents. Councilman Thornton stated he was of the understanding that this program was supposed to better inform the governing body so that when we are out in the community, we are well informed and can respond properly. Councilman Riccardi confirmed this, but he is of the opinion that the governing body should not be micro-managing the office and the Administrator. The reports give an overview of what is requested. The Mayor has access and can forward information as needed. Councilman Thornton asked who is responsible for the ticket resolution? The resident that came before the governing body in the past had a legitimate concern and we promised action on it and in his opinion, this process falls short. Can a measure be put in place to evaluate the level of the request before it gets passed on to the governing body. Mayor Wronko stated the report will indicate if there is any failure or delay in response time. Councilman Riccardi stated another item which will be added to the report will indicate if the response time exceeds the standard timeframe. If that occurs, the actual content of the ticket can be provided to all of the governing body by email. Administrator McNeilly stated the procedure is working with responses and it is being utilized by the Clerk's Office and the Finance Department. From there it trails off. It is going to take time. Administrator McNeilly stated he is of the opinion that Councilman Thornton is looking for something similar to what was provided in the past when there was a sheet that detailed zoning violations. Councilman Thornton confirmed this and stated he does not want to be surprised when a resident mentions there is an unresolved issue. Administrator McNeilly stated this will continue to be a work in progress and it was surprising how many requests come in specifically for the Mayor.

Boards/Commissions – Councilman Simpson/Councilman Zampino

Councilman Simpson stated he has no report this evening, but he did express his thanks and gratitude to all the Boards and Commissions for their commitment to our community. Councilman Simpson stated he is excited and looking forward to working with everyone in 2026.

Councilman Thornton stated the Tree Lighting and the activities that took place at the Presbyterian Church afterward were well attended. Moving the pictures with Santa to the church afterward seems to have helped the turnout. The Recreation Committee did a great job as always.

ADMINISTRATOR'S REPORT

2025 Employee Manual Update – Administrator McNeilly stated every two years the employee manual is updated. Changes have been made in the area of anti-harassment and defined protection of pregnant women for 2025. Administrator McNeilly stated he and the Borough's Labor Attorney, Ursula Leo, have completed all the changes. Training and required notification

were distributed to all staff. The resolution on the agenda this evening is the final part of the submission to the Morris County JIF.

Road Resurfacing – Administrator McNeilly stated the road resurfacing for 2025 has been completed. Main Street was a challenge, and the residents really rose to the challenge and were very accommodating.

Property Sale Requests – Administrator McNeilly stated a request has been received asking if the Borough will sell a portion of the right of way located on Hickory Drive to the owners of #3 Hickory Drive. Administrator McNeilly is researching on how to accomplish a portion sale and how to have a value assigned to it. The Borough's right of way in this area is enormous. There is a 50 foot right of way on an 18-foot-wide road. Councilman Riccardi asked why the right of way is so large. Administrator McNeilly stated there are others which are similar in the Borough, but he does not know why.

52-56 Main Street – Administrator McNeilly stated a request was received from NJ Natural Gas asking the Borough to allow a service connection to be run across the Kelly Place Parking Lot to connect to Kelly Place. This request is being made as a result of the Borough's five (5) year no road opening of fresh pavement. Main Street cannot be opened. Kelly Place is not under the moratorium. Administrator McNeilly stated he needs direction from the Council before any effort is put forth with regard to the legal and engineering issues of the connection. The request is not insurmountable, however there is a hydrant there, a water line and stormwater. Councilman Wachterhauser asked why this is being asked for now. The moratorium was noticed exhaustively. Administrator McNeilly stated he is working with NJ Natural Gas, not the homeowner, so he does not know the reasoning. This would put a gas line easement across the parking lot. Councilman Wachterhauser asked if the gas company would repave the parking lot afterwards. Administrator McNeilly stated he could ask the gas company that question. Councilman Romano asked if there would be any cost to the Borough. Administrator McNeilly replied there would be arrangements made so there are no costs to the Borough. Much discussion took place regarding the roads with moratoriums which exist on Grove, Elm, Sunset, Ridge, Overhill, West, Mountain View and Main Street. New Street will be added to the list next year. Moratoriums exist on these roads because they were paved with DOT funding or by the municipality. There will be a lot of paving done next year, but it will be done by NJ Natural Gas. Administrator McNeilly stated he will contact the gas company and let them know there is no objection if they can pave the parking lot afterwards.

Main Street Lights – Administrator McNeilly stated the light fixtures, not just the bulbs are failing along Main Street. The six (6) lights which are not working are due to transformer failures due to age and moisture. A quote has been received for ten (10) units to be converted to LED lights which would qualify for a JCPL rebate. The material cost for the ten units is \$15,000 in total. The DPW would be able to do the removal and the installation. The goal would be to replace 10 with 2025 funds and then add the cost of the remaining lights to the 2026 budget. Councilman Wachterhauser asked if the lights on Sparta Road are the same. Administrator McNeilly stated the Sparta Road lights are LED's and they are not from the same company. The Christmas lights will stay on for a while longer than usual until the new lights can be purchased and installed. The oldest section will be replaced first. Eric Keller, Borough Engineer, stated the lights from the municipal building to just before Bell's Mansion were done on one contract. The lights did not go as far as Bell's Mansion due to the fact Bell's already had lighting installed there. That section is 15 years old. The second contract was from Borough Hall down Main Street and those lights are 10 years old. Councilman Thornton asked if the lighting problem will also manifest with the lights on Sparta Road. Administrator McNeilly stated this will not be an issue. Those lights are different and they are LEDs. The only issue on Sparta Road is the danger from cars.

Councilman Riccardi asked if there is an update on replacing the damaged crosswalk light. Administrator McNeilly stated the DPW and Gilmore Electric are working on that repair. Councilman Riccardi asked about the missing guardrail on McKinley Street between and the light which is a county issue. Councilman Riccardi asked if the County can be contacted as to when that will be replaced as it is a big open space. Administrator McNeilly stated he will send out that request tomorrow.

Councilman Wachterhauser thanked the DPW for hanging the banners on the light poles and then removing them. Some of the black surface on the bottoms are chipping away. Administrator

McNeilly stated this was discussed with the vendor and the reason is from the contact with the animals. The banners will be looked at in the spring to see how they may be able to be retouched. Councilman Thornton asked if something can be sprayed on them to keep the animals away.

DeskPro – Administrator McNeilly stated that DeskPro still has not provided the NJ Business Registration which is required to be able to do business with public entities in New Jersey. DeskPro has been asked numerous times to provide the registration and they have indicated each time that they are working on it. The Borough cannot pay them until that registration is received. Councilman Romano stated he was under the impression that DeskPro does business with other entities in the state.

Budget 2026 Timeline – Administrator McNeilly stated budget discussions will take place at the January 20th Mayor and Council meeting.

COUNCIL DISCUSSION

2026 Reorganization Meeting – Mayor Wronko asked Ellen Horak, Borough Clerk, if there are any items that need action from the governing body. Ms. Horak asked if there are any changes or if everything is good. Administrator McNeilly stated the Conflict Counsel, Robert Morgenstern, is no longer residing in this area and he asked if this position could be left open. In the event that conflict counsel is needed, Administrator McNeilly asked Attorney Ursula Leo if counsel could be appointed by resolution should the need arise. Attorney Leo confirmed this. Administrator McNeilly asked the Clerk to remove Mr. Morgenstern's name from the resolution.

NEW BUSINESS

RESOLUTIONS

Resolution 184-25

RESOLUTION AMENDING STANHOPE BOROUGH'S EMPLOYEE HANDBOOK

WHEREAS, the Borough of Stanhope maintains an Employee Handbook, last revised January 2024; and

WHEREAS, the Borough Attorney has reviewed certain provisions within the Handbook and made amendments in compliance with the Municipal Excess Liability Joint Insurance Fund 2025-2026 Employment Practices Risk Control Program.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, by the Borough Council of the Borough of Stanhope, County of Sussex, State of New Jersey, that the Employee Handbook is revised to incorporate the changes recommended by the Borough's Attorney to be in compliance with the Municipal Excess Liability Joint Insurance Fund 2025-2026 Employment Practices Risk Control Program.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the Employee Handbook is amended effective as of this date to include these changes.

If any section, subsection, sentence, clause or phrase in this resolution is for any reason held to be unconstitutional or invalid, such decision shall not affect the remaining portions of this resolution.

On motion by Councilman Wachterhauser, seconded by Councilman Thornton and unanimously carried by voice vote, the foregoing resolution was duly adopted.

Resolution 185-25

RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING REFUND OF REDEMPTION MONIES TO OUTSIDE LIEN HOLDER

WHEREAS, at the Municipal Tax Sale held on October 30, 2024, a lien was sold on Block 11603 Lot 2, also known as 3 James Street, for 2023 delinquent sewer and water charges; and

WHEREAS, this lien which is known as Tax Sale Certificate #24-00028 was sold to Bala Partners, LLC at 0% interest and a Premium of \$600.00; and

WHEREAS, Powers Kirn, LLC, legal representative for Pennymac Loan Services, mortgagee, has effected a redemption of certificate #24-00028 in the amount of \$3,065.54; and

WHEREAS, the Tax Collector certifies that the reimbursement is now required to be made for the required redemption amounts as shown below:

Redemption Amount: Outside Lien #24-00028 and Interest	\$3,065.54
Premium Paid by Lienholder	600.00

Total From Current Fund:	\$3,065.54
Total From Tax Premium Account	600.00

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, by the Borough Council of the Borough of Stanhope, County of Sussex, State of New Jersey that the Governing Body acknowledges that Bala Partners, LLC is entitled to the redemption in the total amount of \$3,665.54; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Chief Financial Officer be authorized to issue a check in the total amount of \$3,665.54 for the total redemption of certificate #24-00028 payable to Bala Partners, LLC, PO Box 303, Pottersville, NJ 07979; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that a certified copy of this Resolution be forwarded to the Borough Chief Financial Officer and the Borough Tax Collector.

On motion by Councilman Riccardi, seconded by Councilman Romano and unanimously carried by voice vote, the foregoing resolution was duly adopted.

Mayor’s Acceptance of Resignation

<u>Resolution 186-25</u>	MAYOR’S ACCEPTANCE OF RESIGNATION OF STEVEN PITTIGHER FROM HIS EMPLOYMENT WITH THE BOROUGH OF STANHOPE WITH COUNCIL CONCURRENCE
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THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Council of the Borough of Stanhope they do hereby concur with the Mayor’s acceptance of Steven Pittigher’s resignation from all positions of employment with the Borough of Stanhope, effective January 1, 2026.

On motion by Councilman Zampino, seconded by Councilman Romano and unanimously carried by voice vote, the foregoing resolution was duly adopted.

PAYMENT OF BILLS

<u>Resolution 187-25</u>	RESOLUTION OF THE MAYOR AND COUNCIL OF THE BOROUGH OF STANHOPE AUTHORIZING PAYMENT OF BILLS
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WHEREAS, the Chief Finance Officer has certified that funds are available in the proper account; and

WHEREAS, the Chief Finance Officer has approved payment upon certification from the Borough Department Heads that the goods and/or services have been rendered to the Borough;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Mayor and Council of the Borough of Stanhope that the current bills list, dated December 9, 2025, and on file and available for public inspection in the Office of the Chief Finance Officer and approved by the Chief Finance Officer for payment, be paid.

On motion by Councilman Romano, seconded by Councilman Thornton and unanimously carried by the following roll call vote, the foregoing resolution was duly adopted.

Roll Call:

Councilman Riccardi – yes
Councilman Romano – yes
Councilman Simpson – yes

Councilman Thornton – yes
Councilman Wachterhauser – yes
Councilman Zampino – yes

ATTORNEY REPORT

Attorney Ursula Leo stated she had no report this evening.

CITIZEN’S TO BE HEARD

Mayor Wronko opened the meeting to the public after advising attendees that there is a five (5) minute time limit for each speaker.

Seeing no one from the public wishing to speak, Mayor Wronko closed the public portion of the meeting.

ADJOURNMENT

On motion by Councilman Romano, seconded by Councilman Riccardi and unanimously carried by voice vote the meeting was adjourned at 8:39 P.M.

Approved:

Linda Chirip
Deputy Clerk for
Ellen Horak, RMC
Borough Clerk