



Commissioner Meeting of January 28, 2026 at 6:00 PM
Sussex County Administrative Center
Commissioner Meeting Room
One Spring Street
Newton, NJ

Minutes

Item

1. **CALL TO ORDER BY DIRECTOR** Director Space called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.
2. **ROLL CALL** Director Space, Deputy Director DeGroot, Commissioner Carney, Commissioner Henderson, and Commissioner Silverthorne were all in attendance. County Administrator Christina Marks, Clerk of the Board Linda Miller, and County Counsel Doug Steinhardt, Esq. were also in attendance.
3. **MOMENT OF SILENCE AND SALUTE TO THE FLAG** Director Space asked for a moment of silence and a salute to the flag.
4. **PUBLIC STATEMENT**

"Pursuant to the Open Public Meetings Act, Chapter 231, P.L. 1975 Adequate Notice as defined by Section 3D of Chapter 231, P.L. 1975, has been made by regular mail and email, such notice being submitted on January 6, 2026 from the Administrative Center of the County of Sussex, located at One Spring Street, Newton, New Jersey to the following:

New Jersey Herald

Star Ledger

Straus News

and is also posted on the bulletin board maintained in the Administrative Center for public announcements and has been submitted to the Sussex County Clerk in compliance with said Act." At this time please mute all electronic devices.

5. **APPROVAL OF AGENDA.** Director Space advised that there was a change to the agenda. Item 13 A and B were being moved to after executive session and item 14B was being tabled.

MOTION to approve the Agenda as amended was moved by Commissioner Henderson with a second by Commissioner Silverthorne. No discussion was had and all members present voted in the affirmative.

6. PROCLAMATIONS/CERTIFICATES/PRESENTATIONS-NONE

7. PUBLIC HEARING

8. PUBLIC SESSION FROM THE FLOOR

This Public Session is for those wishing to make a comment of three minutes or less regarding an Agenda Item. Please line up at the microphone and state your name, municipality and Agenda Topic for the record

MOTION to open the floor for public comment was moved by Deputy Director DeGroot with a second by Commissioner Carney. No discussion was had and all members present voted in the affirmative.

No one came up to speak during this public session.

MOTION to close the floor for public comment was moved by Commissioner Henderson with a second by Commissioner Silverthorne. No discussion was had and all members present voted in the affirmative.

9. COMMISSIONERS' COMMENTS

Commissioner Silverthorne

"I attended the Vernon reorg with several other commissioners.

I had my county orientation, met all the department heads. Thank you to everybody that, attended, and the information was awesome.

I attended the Sussex County Arts and Heritage Council, 55th anniversary reception and art exhibit with Ralph Porter, the President and Joe Fontana, the executive director. It turned out there was an exhibit by Ralph in one of my restaurants, so we had something in common there.

I also went to a couple of garages with Christina Marks right before the storm, got to a couple of them just to check on them. So that was good.

The Sussex County Library System is excited to announce its first ever winter art-a-thon. Artists of all ages are invited to celebrate the season with creativity throughout the month of February. Interested participants can visit any branch in February to pick up an eight and a half by 11 piece of card stock and create an original piece of work inspired by the theme of winter submissions. As the submissions come in, they will be displayed to create a self-inspired winter wonderland. Completed artwork should be returned to any library branch by the end of February. Each branch will display the submissions for patrons to enjoy. Participation is open to library card holders of any age. You can find information on this at the county website and that's all I have."

Commissioner Henderson

“Good evening. On January 15th, Commissioner Carney, Commissioner Silverthorne and I attended the Vernon Township reorganization meeting. Congratulations to the two new council members sworn in and the newly appointed Mayor Pat Higgins. Also on the 15th, I attended Newton’s reorganization meeting. Congratulations to those sworn in for another term and the newly appointed mayor, Matthew Dixon.

On January 20th, I attended my first Sussex County Board of Ag Committee meeting as a new liaison. Growing up at a family dairy farm here in Sussex County, I found the meeting quite interesting, as the look of farming has changed drastically over the last several decades here in Sussex County. There was a presentation done by the State Ag development committee about the right to farm and farmland preservation. Since a new state formula for funding farmers for the value of their land has been expanded, there has been an increased number of those looking to preserve farms statewide. Also, there are a few farms here in Sussex County that are currently being examined for preservation in the future. I know Commissioner Carney had mentioned last year that currently in Sussex County, we have an estimated 47% of the property preserved that encompasses 161,000 acres. That includes federal, state, municipal, nonprofit, private utilities and preserved farmlands.

On Tuesday the 27th I attended the Sussex County Community College trustee meeting. As I had mentioned the public safety training academy graduated over 100 firemen from 20 different municipalities. The training varied from new firemen to high level chiefs. Very impressive numbers for all volunteer firemen here in Sussex County. Sussex County College signed an agreement with Ramapo College to bring Bachelor's education to Sussex County Community College starting in the fall of 2026. The goal of this program is to keep students here in Sussex County, and hopefully they will join the Sussex County Workforce. The college has completed, or nearly completed, several of their capital improvement renovations and will be opening shortly. There are a lot of new things happening at the college. I urge all of you to visit their website for news and updates.

Lastly, it was mentioned approximately 50 to 65 outside agencies host their events at the college. This is not only a plus for the various users of the grounds, but it brings people to the college to see what Sussex County Community College has to offer anyone of any age, and that's all I have.”

Commissioner Carney

“We'll start with winter storm program update. The 2025-2026 season has kept the Division of Public Works very busy. So for the season, there has been 16 winter storms. The winter response program has included upwards of 12,000 staff hours allocated to operating equipment and managing the program. 67 plow routes. Snow removal operations are supported by the Office of Bridge and Traffic Safety, along with the Office of Fleet Management, providing real time response to equipment breakdowns. The most recent storm impacted the county by dumping up to 20 inches of snow. Prudent management of operations by division, along with continued support by the commissioner board, keeps the county in a strong position responding to future storms. Our strong response capability is directly attributed to a team of highly skilled and dedicated individuals, a fleet of able and ready equipment and funding levels that provide for an ample on hand amount of salt. The Board recognizes and appreciates long hours and

dedication of the Public Works team, along with the county support staff involved in providing this public service in a highly professional and capable manner. I just want to add to this, I know facilities, they don't get much of a shout out, but they also do some plowing and shoveling and whatnot. So kudos to those guys too. You know, they're up as much as the DPW, so I appreciate them as well.

Sussex County bridge X 43 in Wantage Township. The county is currently advertising for bids to replace Sussex County bridge X 43 in Wantage Township. The bridge is located on county route 651 locally known as Unionville Road, between route 23 and George road. The project will require full closure of county route 651, of the bridge. A detour will be posted for the duration of the construction. An exact construction schedule will be determined following an award of the construction contract, and the project will be largely funded through a New Jersey Department of Transportation local grant program.

Sussex County trails grant program. As a reminder, solicitations are now open for the 26 Sussex County trails grant program. The grant program is funded through the Sussex County farmland preservation, recreation, open space trust funds. Grants can be used to assist eligible applicants with construction, rehabilitation, restoration and maintenance of publicly owned and shared trails. Any questions or more information on the grant program can be provided by contacting the Sussex County Division of planning at 973-579-0500.

I know Commissioner Henderson just touched on this, but Sussex County farmland preservation - Over the next few months, the division of planning and the Sussex County Agriculture Development Board will be finalizing work on the updated Sussex County comprehensive farmland preservation plan. The plan reviews the state of agricultural operations within the county and will establish goals and objectives for the program over the next 10 years. The final draft plan is expected to be available for discussion during the Agricultural Development Board meeting in March. The County Agricultural Development Board is expected to have a plan recommendation to the commissioner board this summer. Questions or more information on the draft plan of farmland preservation program could be directed to Sussex County Ag development board or the Sussex County Division of planning again at 973-579-0500.

I was able to attend last week with Christina Marks, and coincidentally, Senator Steinhardt was there to swear in our new NJAC President. That's New Jersey Association of Counties down in Trenton. So that was nice. Congratulations to Jim Kern from Warren County for being sworn in as president. I got sworn in as a member as well. Always a good event. I also met with our new prosecutor. For people who don't know, will be sworn in on Monday, I believe at nine o'clock up at the courthouse. That's Dan Perez. He'll be serving a five year term. So kudos to him as well. Congratulations to him. That's all I have. Thank you."

Deputy Director DeGroot

"Good evening, everyone. First I attended the Workforce Development Board meeting of Northwest New Jersey, where our very own Assemblyman Mike Inganamort of LD 24 led a thoughtful discussion. Topics included housing affordability for younger generations, particularly my generation, Gen Z, the Select aside act and reflections on the Murphy administration. The board also heard from Morris Sussex Warren employment and training services, which highlighted several local success stories in digital literacy training, GED completion and employment placement support from workers within our region.

Moving on, I attended the Sussex County Community College Board of Trustees meeting. The College continues to make steady progress across academics, facilities, student life, and community partnerships. As mentioned, a major highlight discussed was a new agreement with Ramapo College to offer a bachelor's in education at SCCC beginning in fall 2026; an important step towards addressing teacher shortage by keeping graduates in Sussex County. The Board also reviewed advancements in workforce, credential programs, faculty and student achievements and the completion or continued progress of key capital projects, including the Learning Commons, athletics, student affairs. The foundation for the community college also reported positive momentum and student engagement, support services and scholarship opportunities, reinforcing the college's strong focus on students, success and community impact.

Additionally, in collaboration with Director Space, we met with Senior Services and our county historian to develop a coordinated plan to celebrate the 250th anniversary of America's independence, with the shared objective of creating a centralized county wide celebration that includes educational programming vendors and community focused activities, as well as engaging festivities, while working collaboratively with all municipalities across Sussex County through basically a shared service type of deal approach. Details regarding the date and location are currently being finalized as availability is confirmed, and another key goal is to make the 250th anniversary unifying theme celebrated throughout the county, including within county library, senior programs and other county sponsored events, with 2026 shaping up to be an exciting and meaningful year. I'm happy to continue building upon this coordination on a weekly basis.

Finally, had a pleasure of attending some events over the past weeks, I had to travel to Florida to participate in the Gen Z Leadership Conference. Additionally, I also had the honor of attending March for Life in Washington, DC, which was a powerful and meaningful experience. It was very inspiring stand alongside so many who share the commitment to protecting God's precious gift of life. And I'm grateful for the remarks from Vice President JD Vance House Speaker Mike Johnson, and New Jersey's very own congressman, Chris Smith, as well as the continued support of New Jersey right to life here in the Garden State. That's all for tonight. Thank you. God bless.”

Director Space

“Thank you. I just want to reiterate what Deputy Director DeGroot said. We are really looking forward to this 250th celebration. We're hoping to have one unifying event where all the municipalities come together. I know a lot of municipalities are probably going to do their own, but we would like to have one big thing, fireworks. It's going to be a big deal. And we're excited about that. I really want to thank Deputy Administrator Lorraine Hentz because when you involve Lorraine with anything, she takes hold of it. And the morning after our meeting, Lorraine already had a county pin designed for us, so we're excited about that, with the 250 emblem on them on it. So that's going to be a great event.

I want to also thank the road department and facilities for their excellent job during the storm. I live on a county road, and my road was in pretty good shape considering the amount of snow that we got, and I didn't make it to the gym that day because my husband told me I had to have the gym as Mother Nature. So I did do a lot of shoveling, so I can appreciate what they do every storm, because I don't normally go out there, because I don't like to be cold. I want to praise our

administrator, Christina Marks for her first almost month officially as administrator. She was on the phone all day this last week with a lot of different things, and she handles everything, and I appreciate her.

want to give a shout out to the library system. Last year, I got my first library card since I was a child, and I have been enjoying the app where you can download the books. Well, yesterday, I went to the library and I printed 250 copies. I was in and out in 10 minutes, and it cost me a third of the price of what I'm used to paying. So shout out to the library. I noticed while I was on their website you can rent things, you know, like pots and not pots and pans, like bakeware. I'm like, Wow, this place is great, but I'm a huge fan of the library now, and I'm probably going to take out a book next time on there.

The Division of Health and Senior Services Valentine's Day drive for veterans. The Sussex County Divisions of Health and Senior Services and the Medical Reserve Corps are collecting essentials for local veterans this Valentine's Day to show appreciation for those that have served our country. Donations can be made at the locations listed below, through February 11, 2026. All donations will be delivered to the veteran clothing closet at the Partnership for social services located in Franklin. For additional information about this drive, please call 973-579-0570, or visit the Sussex County [website at sussex.nj.us](http://www.sussex.nj.us) to view the associated flyer.

The Division of Senior Services, age friendly communities need assessment survey. The Sussex County Board of County Commissioners, Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Senior Services, in partnership with the New Jersey Division of Aging Services and AARP recently launched an age friendly community's needs assessment survey. The survey seeks input from Sussex County residents age 60 and older, to better understand community strengths, needs and priorities that support healthy aging and quality of life. Survey results will help guide future planning programs and initiatives aimed at creating more age friendly communities throughout Sussex County. Responses will be accepted through March, 30, 2026, for additional information, please contact the Sussex County Division of Senior Services at 973-579-0555, extension 1225,

The Division of Senior Services move and groove. The division will be holding a move and groove exercise class at Liberty towers, located at 32 Liberty Street in Newton. The six weeks class offers seniors the ability to participate in simple exercises with music. The class will be held once a week on Tuesdays from February 10 to march 17, from 130 to two. Classes are free, but registration is required. Please call Senior Services at 973-579-0555, extension, 1225, to register or obtain additional information, and that is all I have on that."

10. APPROVAL OF CONSENT AGENDA – there was no consent agenda for this meeting.

11. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Regular Meeting – November 12, 2025
Regular Meeting – November 25, 2025
Regular Meeting – December 10, 2025
Regular Meeting – December 17, 2025
Special Meeting – December 29, 2025

Director Space advised that the approval of the minutes from December 10, 2025 will be moved as they had not been reviewed.

MOTION to approve the minutes from the meeting was moved by Commissioner Henderson with a second by Commissioner DeGroot. No discussion was had. Commissioners Carney and Henderson, Deputy Director DeGroot and Director Space all approved the minutes. Commissioner Silverthorne abstained.

12. **ORDINANCE** no ordinances to consider at this meeting.

13. **APPOINTMENTS AND/OR RESIGNATIONS**

A. RESOLUTION RE:

REAPPOINTMENT OF RONALD PETILLO AS A MEMBER OF THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS OF THE SUSSEX COUNTY MUNICIPAL UTILITIES AUTHORITY FOR A FIVE (5) YEAR TERM TO BE EFFECTIVE FEBRUARY 2, 2026 AND EXPIRE JANUARY 31, 2031

B. RESOLUTION RE:

REAPPOINTMENT OF JOHN H. WESLEY AS A MEMBER OF THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS OF THE SUSSEX COUNTY MUNICIPAL UTILITIES AUTHORITY FOR A FIVE (5) YEAR TERM TO BE EFFECTIVE FEBRUARY 2, 2026 AND EXPIRE JANUARY 31, 2031

The appointments were moved to after executive session.

14. **RESOLUTIONS**

A. RESOLUTION RE:

TELECOMMUNICATIONS SERVICES IN THE AMOUNT OF \$15,714.00 TO FACILITATE NETWORK / FIREWALL IMPROVEMENT THAT WILL ENHANCE THE CYBER SECURITY POSTURE OF THE SUSSEX COUNTY SHERIFF'S 911 COMMUNICATIONS CENTER AUTHORIZING THE APPLICATION, AND ACCEPTANCE OF AWARD, FOR THE FY2026 NEXT GENERATION 9-1-1 (NG9-1-1) GRANT (FY26-100-137-010) FROM THE NJ OFFICE OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY, OFFICE OF EMERGENCY PSAP FOR THE PERIOD OF JULY 1, 2025 TO JUNE 30, 2026

B. RESOLUTION RE:

AUTHORIZING A PROFESSIONAL SERVICES AGREEMENT FOR ARCHITECTURAL SERVICES FOR THE COUNTY OF SUSSEX DIVISION OF FACILITIES MANAGEMENT WITH E I ASSOCIATES, ARCHITECTS AND ENGINEERS IN THE AMOUNT OF \$55,800.00

C. RESOLUTION RE:

AUTHORIZATION TO GRANT TO ELIZABETHTOWN GAS COMPANY, A PUBLIC UTILITY COMPANY, A CONDITIONAL WAIVER FROM COUNTY POLICY FOR ROAD OPENINGS FOR

WORK WITHIN COUNTY ROUTE 517 DURING THE COUNTY'S
WINTER WORK MORATORIUM

D. RESOLUTION RE:

AUTHORIZING EXECUTION AND FILING OF A DEED NOTICE FOR
STORMWATER MANAGEMENT MEASURES INSTALLED TO
SUPPORT CONSTRUCTION OF THE PUBLIC HEALTH MEDICAL
SHELTER LOCATED ON PROPERTY OWNED BY THE COUNTY OF
SUSSEX AT 150 MORRIS TURNPIKE, FRANKFORD TOWNSHIP
BLOCK 22 LOT 4

E. RESOLUTION RE:

AUTHORIZATION TO PROVIDE FOR ON-CALL ENGINEERING
SERVICES FOR COUNTY BRIDGE REHABILITATION
AND REPLACEMENT PROJECTS FOR BRIDGE X-43, UNIONVILLE,
WANTAGE TOWNSHIP TO VAN CLEEF ENGINEERING IN THE
AMOUNT
OF \$203,634.65

MOTION to adopt the Resolutions A-E was moved by Commissioner Carney with a second by
Commissioner Silverthorne. No discussion was had.

(Roll call vote)

Deputy Director DeGroot - YES

Commissioner Henderson - YES

Commissioner Silverthorne - YES

Director Space - YES

Commissioner Carney - YES

15. AWARDS OF CONTRACT/CHANGE ORDERS/BID-NONE

16. FINANCIAL

A. RESOLUTION RE:

PAYMENT OF BILLS LIST A
January 28, 2026

MOTION to Pay Bills List A was moved by Commissioner Carney with a second by Deputy
Director DeGroot. No discussion was had.

(Roll Call Vote)

Deputy Director DeGroot - YES

Commissioner Henderson - YES

Commissioner Silverthorne - YES

Director Space - YES

Commissioner Carney - YES

B. RESOLUTION RE:

PAYMENT OF BILLS LIST B
January 28, 2026

(Commissioner DeGroot Abstains)

MOTION to Pay Bills List B was moved by Commissioner Henderson with a second by Commissioner Silverthorne. No discussion was had.

(Roll Call Vote)

Deputy Director DeGroot - ABSTAIN

Commissioner Henderson - YES

Commissioner Silverthorne - YES

Director Space - YES

Commissioner Carney - YES

C. INTRODUCTION FOR FIRST READING

AUTHORIZING CAP TO LIMIT COUNTY BUDGET
APPROPRIATION INCREASE IN CY 2026 COUNTY
BUDGET TO 3.5% OVER THE PREVIOUS YEAR'S
FINAL APPROPRIATIONS SUBJECT TO CERTAIN EXCEPTIONS
AND TO ESTABLISH AN APPROPRIATION CAP BANK

MOTION to adopt this Resolution on the first reading was moved by Commissioner Silverthorne with a second by Commissioner Henderson. No discussion was had.

(Roll call vote)

Deputy Director DeGroot - YES

Commissioner Henderson - YES

Commissioner Silverthorne - YES

Director Space - YES

Commissioner Carney - YES

17. PERSONNEL – No personnel agenda for this meeting.

1. ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT Department of Engineering has been monitoring the County's salt reserves especially after this last storm. Generally the County uses between 20,000 and 22,000 tons of salt during an average winter season. The average use includes salt for Stillwater, Andover, Sussex, SCCC and Kittatinny Regional High School with a season that runs from November through March. I spoke with staff and based on this season, the county will need between 11,000 and 13,000 tons of salt for the balance of this season. We currently have 11,000 tons of salt in stock and another 3,900 salt on order. Delivery of the recent salt order has been slow to arrive and it is a difficult time of year for salt deliveries, especially because of the frequency of storms.

Based on the department's review, if the remainder of the years is average, the county could project ending the season with 2,500 tons of salt. If the current trend continues, the county's supply will quickly be depleted. The response for an average 4 inch storms requires about 1,000 tons of salt.

We also have been contacted by three municipalities that have completely depleted their supplies. One was actually receiving a confirmed delivery today. I have reached out to the deputy chief of staff for Governor Sherrill and have not received a call back today to advocate for the county and the municipalities with the county regarding this shortage. I will update the board once I receive further information.

2. **Frankford campus wells.** The snow put us back a couple days going live on the wells, but that will be completed, inspected and signed off on by Friday.
3. The Department of Health and Human Services had their Opioid settlement quarterly meeting today and will have a report for the next meeting.
4. The new website went live on January 20th. I hope everyone has had an opportunity to look at it. There are still a few glitches that the County is working on to correct, but we have received positive feedback so far.
5. **Lafayette Pole Barn** –There are continued issues with the approved contractor on this project. County Counsel sent a letter regarding deficiencies on January 21st and we have not yet received a response. The current recommendation is to send a copy of counsel’s letter to the surety company to put them on notice. The contractor has not been out to the property this week, which could be because of the snow but we have staff stopping at the property multiple times a day each day to inspect what is occurring.
6. Homestead Rehabilitation and Healthcare Center – to be discussed in Executive Session
7. CWA Local 1032 to be discussed in Executive Session
8. Last but certainly not least, I want to thank all county employees who worked hard during this weekend’s storm. This was a very large storm not seen in the county in some time. I checked in with staff throughout the duration and other than some issues with equipment that were quickly put back into service, there were no major issues that were seen. Commissioner Silverthorne and I attempted to meet with staff at their respective garages prior to the start of the storm, but by the time staff was called out and arrived, the storm began much sooner and they had to quickly get out on the road. We wanted to provide some time for the staff to get back and settled and we will be going back out to personally let all staff know the wonderful job that was done.

19. **COUNTY COUNSEL REPORT** No report

20. **UNFINISHED BUSINESS** There was no unfinished business discussed at this meeting.

21. **NEW BUSINESS** Director Space advised that due to a resignation on the planning board, the county would be considering the appointment of Jennifer Johnson as a full member to the Sussex County Planning Board to serve the remainder of the unexpired term of Joseph Flannigan. Said term to begin immediately and expire on December 31, 2027. Jennifer was already an alternate member on the Planning Board. Director Space asked for a motion for the appointment, which was moved by Deputy Director DeGroot with a second by Commissioner Carney. No discussion was had.

Roll Call Vote

Deputy Director DeGroot – YES

Commissioner Henderson – YES

Commissioner Silverthorne – YES

Director Space – YES
Commissioner Carney – YES

Director Space advised there was an additional item – Resolution authorizing the execution of an amendment to the contract between the County of Sussex and the County of Morris for the provision of housing inmates. Director Space asked for a motion which was made by Commissioner Henderson with a second by Commissioner Silverthorne. County Counsel Steinhardt advised the County had ongoing negotiations with Morris County and since Sussex County had not seen the type of occupancy in the current agreement, a reduction was negotiated. No discussion was had.

Roll Call Vote
Deputy Director DeGroot – YES
Commissioner Henderson – YES
Commissioner Silverthorne – YES
Director Space – YES
Commissioner Carney – YES

Commissioner Carney asked if the County will be advertising for the new open position for the Planning Board. Director Space advised this position would be advertised.

22. PUBLIC SESSION FROM THE FLOOR

This Public Session is for those wishing to make general comments of three minutes or less on non-agenda topics. Please line up at the microphone and state your name and municipality for the record.

MOTION to open the floor for public comment was moved by Deputy Director DeGroot with a second by Commissioner Silverthorne. No discussion was had and all members present voted in the affirmative.

Ken Collins, Andover, NJ

Mr. Collins spoke about Alex Pretti's shooting and his views regarding the Trump Administration. Mr. Collins discussed what he feels America needs right now and stated the Board needed to issue a resolution to stand against what he stated was aggression by the Federal Government. Mr. Collins also asked the Board if they prepared a response to FIRE.

Amy Lenay, Lafayette, NJ

Ms. Lenay recited a poem by a German philosopher in German and then translated it into English.

Norma Brand, Wantage, NJ

Ms. Brand stated that she noticed her statement regarding religious speech from the dais was responded to, but the Board does not respond to other constituent questions. Ms. Brand further stated that she notices the Board whisper behind cupped hands. Ms. Brand then expressed her First Amendment.

Pamela Gray, Stillwater, NJ

Ms. Gray stated that she wrote to Commissioner DeGroot regarding her concern about his religious statements and her feelings about the legal permissibility of it.

Jean Apriage, Hampton Township, NJ

Ms. Apriage spoke about Trump and what she feels are his lies and what she feels is currently happening around the Country. Ms. Apriage further stated that every commissioner must pledge to ensure that the democratic system is safe and that the Board will protect the right to vote.

Sandy Pender, Fredon Township, NJ

Ms. Pender spoke about her thoughts regarding the phrase Make America Great Again. She stated that she feels this phrase can be polarizing and that she feels the phrase fits the current moment but not in the way Trump envisions it.

Ms. Pender further asked the Board what they are doing as elected officials to protect democracy.

Karen Bolsonaro, Wantage Township, NJ

Ms. Bolsonaro stated that she feels everyone views the world in the lens of their own life experiences and shared insight into hers as a second generation American of immigrants from Eastern Europe.

Kimberly Knoll, Sparta, NJ

Ms. Knoll stated that she was speaking to the Board as a private citizen, not as a member of the Board of Education and that everything expressed was her own opinion. Ms. Knoll spoke about ICE detention centers, specifically Roxbury, NJ and asked the Board to use whatever influence they have to protect the community.

David DeWitt, Hampton Township, NJ

Mr. DeWitt spoke about the Sussex County Republican Committee's web page and the details he found on the page. Mr. DeWitt also spoke about Trump and his view of the administration

Sandy Hall, Layton, NJ

Ms. Hull stated that she heard previously from employees that made statements about the conditions of their offices. Ms. Hull feels selling the jail should be reviewed and that she hopes the jail does not end up being a detention center.

Christina Henry, Vernon, NJ.

Ms. Henry asked the Board what they were doing to preserve democracy and discussed the deportations of individuals and what is occurring in the country by the current administration.

Kathy Brennan, Hampton Township, NJ

Ms. Brennan spoke about the organization Indivisible Sussex and that it is an organization committed to honoring people equally and with dignity. Ms. Brennan spoke about how she was upset about ICE and the current activities of Indivisible Sussex.

John Snyder, Sandyston, NJ

Mr. Snyder stated that he was appalled over what he had heard at the meeting and that he cannot believe how much this country has deteriorated. Mr. Snyder stated his support for the SAVE Act. Mr. Snyder stated he feels he has to defend the president and the hatred he is hearing is shocking to him.

Ray DeSoto, Frankford, NJ

Mr. DeSoto discussed the constitution and the freedom of religion and the First Amendment.

Debbie Mello, Fredon Township, NJ

Ms. Mello asked the Board if they were proud to be a republican, discussed President Trump and her view of his activities and what is occurring in the country under the current administration.

Laura (last name inaudible)

Speaker stated that after several meetings the past year, she feels she has learned a lot.

MOTION to close the floor for public comment and return to regular business was moved by Commissioner Silverthorne with a second by Commissioner Henderson. No discussion was had and all members present voted in the affirmative.

County Counsel Steinhardt asked to provide a report at this time. Mr. Steinhardt, Esq. stated "I know there's a lot going on in the world today, a lot of side choosing and finger pointing, and I am 57 years old. I am well on the, unless I'm going to live to be 114, I'm well on the back half of my bell curve. But my kids are 22 and 27 and, you know, I go to bed every night praying to whomever I choose to pray to about what the world looks like for them, as I suspect most of you guys do for your kids, your grandkids, your neighbors, your family members, whomever. We all come here asking that our First Amendment rights, I did my best to jot some of this down. So bear with me, be respected and our voices heard. That same protection applies equally to speech. We may not personally share a keep the Christ in Christmas, a God bless, a right to life reference is an expression of personal belief, not the government, establishment of religion, and silencing it would contradict the very free speech principles that many of you are asking this board to honor. There was a long line of United States Supreme Court's jurisprudence that go back hundreds of years. I'm going to pick one of the more recent, Kennedy versus the Bremerton School District. It's at 597 US Supreme Court reports page 23 was decided in 2022 and it makes clear that the constitutional protections a public official has applies to their personal religious expression, and that allowing that speech is not an establishment of religion, but suppressing it actually would be Joseph Kennedy was a high school football coach in Bremerton, Washington. After games, he would briefly kneel and pray at midfield on the football field. The prayer was short, personal, voluntary and not part of any official team activity. At first,

Kennedy prayed by himself. Over time, some players and members of the public occasionally joined him, but he didn't require that, encourage it or organize the participation. The school district told Coach Kennedy to stop praying on the field. They said that because he was a taxpayer funded public school employee, because his prayers were visible, that they might be perceived as government endorsement of religion and then allowing it could violate the Establishment Clause. Kennedy said he was willing to pray quietly, to pray alone, and to pray after his official duties were complete. The district still prohibited prayer and eventually placed them on administrative leave and did not renew his contract. Coach Kennedy sued the school district. The Supreme Court said that coach Kennedy's prayers were his private religious expression. It occurred during a moment when other staff were free to do personal activities. There was no evidence that he was coercing students to participate with him. The school district, the court said, acted out of excessive fear of violating the Establishment Clause, therefore silencing prayer violated the First Amendment. Why? I think that matters here. The court explicitly rejected the idea that if a government employee can be seen, their religious expression has to be suppressed. Instead, it drew a very clear line the person. Personal religious expression is not the establishment of religion. So I would say to all of you guys, the very essence of free speech isn't speech we agree with, but it's speech that we tolerate, and asking for free speech only when it sounds like ours or doesn't offend somebody sensibilities, misses the very spirit of why that freedom matters in the first place. So just like you didn't check your first amendment rights at the door when you came here tonight, neither did Commissioner DeGroot.”

23. REMINDERS

Please check the County's website at www.sussex.nj.us for meeting schedules.

24. EXECUTIVE SESSION – (Closed Session)

RESOLUTION RE: PROVIDING FOR AN EXECUTIVE (CLOSED) SESSION NOT OPEN TO THE PUBLIC IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE PROVISIONS OF N.J.S.A. 10:4-12 ET SEQ.

WHEREAS, the subject matter(s) about to be discussed may be excluded from the public portion of the meeting by Resolution of the Board of County Commissioners as an exception to the "Open Public Meetings Act" pursuant to N.J.S.A. 10:4-12 (b); and

WHEREAS, it appears necessary for the Board of County Commissioners to discuss such matter(s) in Executive Session.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Board of County Commissioners of the County of Sussex, in accordance with the provisions of N.J.S.A. 10:4-12(b) and N.J.S.A. 10:4-13 that the Board at this time enter into an Executive Session from which the public shall be excluded; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the general nature of the subject(s) to be discussed relate to the following item(s) authorized by N.J.S.A. 10:4-12(b) as designated below:

(1) **Matters Required by Law to be Confidential:**

_____ (2) **Matters Where the Release of Information Would Impair the Right to Receive Funds:**

_____ (3) **Matters Involving Individual Privacy:**

_____ (4) **Matters Relating to Collective Bargaining Agreements:**

_____ (5) **Matters Relating to the Purchase, Lease of Acquisition of Real Property or the Investment of Public Funds:**

_____ (6) **Matters Relating to Public Safety and Property:**

 X (7) **Matters Relating to Litigation, Negotiations and the Attorney Client Privilege:**

Clarke Moynihan Landscaping LLC – Lafayette Pole Barn

 X (8) **Matters Relating to the Employment Relationship:**

Fire Marshall
Confidential Assistant

_____ (9) **Matters Relating to the Potential Imposition of a Penalty:**

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the deliberations conducted in closed session may be disclosed to the public upon the determination of the Sussex County Board of County Commissioners or provided by law that the public interest will no longer be served by such confidentiality; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that upon completion of the business, for which the Board has entered into the Executive Session, the Board shall reconvene and resume its meeting open to the public; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Board expects to take formal action after returning from Executive Session except to adjourn the regular meeting.

MOTION to adopt the Executive Session Resolution and enter into Executive Session was moved by Commissioner Carney with a second by Commissioner Henderson. No discussion was had and all members present voted in the affirmative.

MOTION to adjourn from Executive Session and return to Regular Business was moved by Commissioner Henderson with a second by Commissioner Silverthorne. No discussion was had and all members present voted in the affirmative.

County Counsel advised that earlier this evening there were two appointments on the agenda for the reappointment to the Sussex County Municipal Utility Authority. There was a legal issue with one of the resolutions to appoint Mr. Petillo for another five year term, which stated he would be appointed without benefits. After having done some research, it was discovered that Mr. Petillo is grandfathered

in as having continuously served on SCMUA since prior to the 2010 law, which would have precluded benefits for part-time appointees. As a result, an amendment needs to be made to his reappointment resolution.

Director Space asked for a **MOTION** to adopt the amended Resolution A and Resolution B, which was moved by Commissioner Henderson with a second by Deputy Director DeGroot. No discussion was had

(Roll call vote)

Deputy Director DeGroot - YES

Commissioner Henderson - YES

Commissioner Silverthorne - YES

Director Space - YES

Commissioner Carney – YES

Director Space asked for a motion to add a personnel agenda to upgrade the position of the fire marshal from part-time to full-time and to upgrade the position of fire inspector from part-time to full-time in the office of the fire marshal. Motion was moved by Commissioner Henderson with a second by Deputy Director DeGroot. No discussion was had.

(Roll call vote)

Deputy Director DeGroot - YES

Commissioner Henderson - YES

Commissioner Silverthorne - YES

Director Space - YES

Commissioner Carney – YES

Director Space asked for a motion to appoint Mark Snook as the Sussex County Fire Marshal for a three year term to begin immediately and expire January 14, 2029. Motion was moved by Commissioner Carney with a second by Commissioner Henderson. No discussion was had.

(Roll call vote)

Deputy Director DeGroot - YES

Commissioner Henderson - YES

Commissioner Silverthorne - YES

Director Space - YES

Commissioner Carney – YES

Director Space asked for a motion to approve a resolution that amended the compensation to the members of SCMUA. Director Space asked for Counsel to provide an explanation for the public. Counsel advised that the only way to properly amend compensation to members of SCMUA would be by resolution that amends or supplements the original 1971 resolution and any subsequent amendments, which was previously done correctly in 2025. This resolution would establish a date certain after which any individuals that sought reappointment would have to accept the position without benefits or risk not being reappointed. Motion was moved by Deputy Director DeGroot with a second by Commissioner Carney. No discussion was had.

(Roll call vote)

Deputy Director DeGroot - YES

Commissioner Henderson - YES

Commissioner Silverthorne - YES

Director Space - YES

Commissioner Carney – YES

25. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION to adjourn the meeting was moved by Commissioner Silverthorne with a second by Commissioner Carney. No discussion was had and all members present voted in the affirmative.