

REGULAR MEETING
MAYOR AND COUNCIL
JULY 20, 2026

Mayor Chegwidden called the meeting to order.

Mayor Chegwidden read the Open Public Meeting Statement.

Roll Call

Mayor Chegwidden requested Roll Call:

Council President Binkoski - Present
Councilwoman Gonzalez - Present
Councilwoman Hobbs - Present
Councilwoman Jones - Present
Councilwoman Wickenheisser - Present
Councilman Yeager – Present

Also in attendance were Administrator David Young, Borough Clerk Cheryl Muzzillo, Attorney Roman Hirniak and Redevelopment Attorney Matt Jessup.

Flag Salute

Mayor Chegwidden led those present in the Salute to the American Flag.

Swearing in of Police Officers & Sergeants

Mayor Chegwidden, Councilman Yeager, and Chief Young administered the Oath of Office to Officer Nicholas Suarez, Officer Dominick Kranz, Sergeant Sean Duffy, Sergeant Robert Norton Jr., and Sergeant Timothy Drake.

Mayor Sam Morris from Mine Hill was also there to welcome the new officers and sergeants. Congratulations and well wishes were offered by all in attendance.

Open to the Public

Mayor Chegwidden opened the meeting to the public.

No one wishing to be heard, Mayor Chegwidden closed the meeting to the public.

Ordinance

Council President Binkoski presented O-17-26, “Ordinance of the Borough of Wharton, in the County of Morris, New Jersey Approving a Tax Exemption and Authorizing the Execution of a Financial Agreement with Pillar Wharton Inc.,” on second reading, by title only.

Mayor Chegwidden opened the meeting to the public.

No one wishing to be heard, Mayor Chegwidden closed the meeting to the public.

A motion was made by Council President Binkoski and seconded by Councilwoman Jones to adopt O-17-26 on second reading.

ROLL CALL VOTE: YEA: 5 NAY: 1 ABSENT: 0 ABSTAIN: 0
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Yeas: Binkoski, Gonzalez, Jones, Wickenheisser, Yeager
Nays: Hobbs

Consent Agenda

The following items are considered to be routine and non-controversial by the Mayor and Council and will be approved by one motion. There will be no separate discussion of these items unless a council member or citizen so requests, in which case, the item will be removed from the Consent Agenda and considered in a normal sequence on the agenda.

Approval of Bills: Approve all bills referred to the Finance Committee			
Approval of Minutes: 6/29/26			
R-125-26: Requesting Approval of Items of Revenue & Appropriation - Recycling Tonnage Grant			
R-126-26: Tax Sale Redemption TSC 2024-016 Realex Holdings LLC			
R-127-26: Audit			
R-128-26: Authorizing a Utility Engineering & Construction Agreement and Amendment - Guardrail Upgrade North			
A motion was made by Council President Binkoski and seconded by Councilwoman Jones to approve all items listed on the Consent Agenda.			
ROLL CALL VOTE: YEA: 6 NAY: 0 ABSENT: ABSTAIN:			

Council Reports

Council President Binkoski: He noted the positive feedback he has received from residents regarding the safety of our community and the work of the Police Department. He also recognized the Fire Department for its exceptional performance and expressed gratitude to all municipal departments for their service to the community.

Councilwoman Gonzalez: She offered congratulations to the newly appointed police officers and promoted sergeants. She commended the Fire Department's swift action in containing the July 12th fire at Luna Restaurant. She presented the monthly DPW report, highlighting: preparations and support for the 250th Anniversary Celebration, installation of 28 additional Hometown Heroes veteran banners, ongoing maintenance projects across municipal water, stormwater, wastewater, and street infrastructure, as well as management of six teams tasked with litter removal, routine Borough property maintenance, and watering municipal flowers.

She also recognized Councilwoman Wickenheisser, the DPW, Police Department, and Fire Department for their efforts in making the 250th Anniversary Celebration a success.

Councilwoman Hobbs: She extended condolences and support to the owners and staff of Luna Restaurant following the recent fire. She congratulated the newly sworn-in police officers and sergeants. She expressed gratitude to staff involved in the municipal audit process. She announced that the next Board of Education meeting is scheduled for Thursday evening.

Councilwoman Jones: She congratulated the newly appointed police officers and promoted sergeants on their achievements.

Councilwoman Wickenheisser: She shared a thank-you note from Centennial Court senior residents expressing gratitude for the decorated doors and ShopRite gift card donations and thanked Councilwoman Gonzalez for her assistance with the initiative. She congratulated the newly sworn-in police officers and sergeants and extended her appreciation to the Fire Department and resident Gabby Nunn for their rapid response during the Luna Restaurant fire.

Councilman Yeager: He expressed satisfaction that the Police Department is fully staffed and congratulated the newly sworn-in officers and promoted sergeants on their well-deserved advancements. He reported that the Fire Department responded to 14 calls in June, in addition to the Luna Restaurant incident and reminded the public that the department is actively seeking additional volunteer members.

Mayor Chegwidde’s Report: He commended Gabby Nunn and the Fire Department for their rapid response, which prevented further damage during the Luna Restaurant fire.

He reported that the Borough fared well during recent severe weather, whereas neighboring towns suffered power outages. He noted that regional utility infrastructure remains largely unchanged over the past 25 years and cited observations from out-of-state utility crews regarding aging equipment. He commended the DPW for proactively working to clear storm drains to prevent local street flooding.

The Mayor reported that construction on the Pine Street Parking Lot is progressing rapidly. He noted that the new Recycling Center is waiting on pending utility work that had been delayed due to the recent storms.

Open to the Public

Mayor Chegwidden opened the meeting to the public.

Colleen Pascale, 4 Sunset Dr.: She commended the Fire Department for their response to the Luna Restaurant fire, highlighting the firefighters' dedication in responding after participating in a parade under extreme heat conditions earlier that day.

James Gottshall, 44 Third St.: He inquired about Councilwoman Hobbs' vote on Ordinance O-17-26 (authorizing a financial agreement with Pillar Wharton Inc.). He questioned why her vote changed from "yes" upon introduction (June 29th) to "no" on second reading, and asked if she would share her reasoning publicly. He noted that the agreement supports eleven affordable housing units, aids the developer's financial feasibility, and assists the Borough in satisfying its state affordable housing obligations, thereby mitigating broader development pressures.

Councilwoman Hobbs responded that she would have preferred an option that did not involve a tax exemption. When asked to detail her reasoning, she noted that the ordinance passed despite her "no" vote and declined to elaborate further on the specifics of her decision.

Mr. Gottshall clarified that Pillar Wharton Inc. would still be making annual payments directly to the Borough under the proposed agreement.

Mayor Chegwidden explained that the ordinance stemmed from an administrative oversight by Pillar Wharton Inc., which had omitted applying for a PILOT as required by their State grant conditions. He noted that while Pillar requested retroactively applying the agreement back three years, the Borough denied that request because the error rested with the developer.

Redevelopment Attorney Matt Jessup clarified the financial terms and confirmed the agreement imposes no burden on taxpayers and gave the following details:

- **Financial Feasibility:** A pro forma review by the Borough's independent financial advisor confirmed that conventional taxation would yield a \$34,000 tax bill, leaving the project with a negative cash flow (\$22,000/year) and rendering it financially unviable.
- **PILOT Terms:** The Borough established a 6.28% PILOT rate yielding approximately \$10,000/year in municipal revenue. This allows the project to maintain a minimal profit margin (~\$2,000/year). Furthermore, State grant terms require Pillar Wharton Inc. to remit ~50% of its profits back to the State to repay grant funding.
- **Revenue Comparison:** Prior to redevelopment, the property yielded approximately \$1,700/year. Under conventional tax distribution, the Borough's share would have been roughly \$7,000/year. Under the PILOT, the Borough receives approximately \$10,000/year.
- **Public Benefit:** Beyond the modest fiscal gain, Mr. Jessup emphasized that the agreement secures eleven critical affordable housing units, satisfies the Borough's Housing Element and Fair Share Plan obligations, and supports a non-profit entity.

Mike Bezney, 1 Bartek Ln.: He inquired whether the Borough's affordable housing obligation from the Wharton Woods development is fulfilled entirely through the Pillar-Wharton Inc. property. It was confirmed this was correct, explaining that while moderate-income housing was originally designated elsewhere in the Master Plan, it was relocated to Main Street. This adjustment added six additional handicapped-accessible units. The Borough has satisfied its affordable housing mandates for the 2025–2035 period; state rules for the 2035–2045 round remain pending. It was noted that the Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) for senior housing at Centennial Court also contributed to the Borough's compliance numbers.

In response to his inquiry regarding the building on Harry Shupe Boulevard, it was clarified that an additional 14 affordable housing units will be located there, demonstrating the Administration's adherence to the Housing Plan.

Mr. Bezney also inquired about plans for the Pine Street Parking Lot. It was confirmed the lot will provide 67 parking spaces, with street-level handicap parking and access stairs leading up to Main Street. The upper area will feature a picnic site and the town's historic clock. Once completed, the Borough will transition Main Street to single-side parking.

Mr. Bezney asked about the repaving schedule for Old Irondale Road and Bartek Lane and was told the paving project is planned for inclusion in the upcoming fiscal year's budget.

Mr. Bezney commended the DPW, Police Department, and Borough staff for their high level of service. He reflected on the Borough's growth over the past 20 years, noting widespread concern throughout Morris County regarding regional infrastructure burdens driven by increasing state mandates.

He inquired about Orchard Mine Park and its completion timeline relative to the nearby development on Harry Shupe Boulevard. It was noted that the Orchard Mine Park project will be going out to bid shortly.

Jim Gottshall, 44 Third St.: He summarized his understanding that approving the Pillar-Wharton Inc. financial agreement does not shift tax burdens onto residents, framing the PILOT as a mutually beneficial tool for both the Borough and the organization. He expressed gratitude for the proactive approach to local affordable housing, noting that proper use of PILOT agreements protects the Borough from litigation and helps maintain municipal control over local planning projects.

He thanked the administration for the new Pine Street Parking Lot and praised the decision to direct PILOT revenue directly toward infrastructure projects, avoiding additional municipal debt for road and infrastructure repairs.

Mayor Chegwidden informed the public that the State of New Jersey is attempting to exert greater control over municipal zoning. Current proposals include mandating accessory dwelling units (ADUs), which would allow residents to convert detached garages and sheds into rental properties. He noted that both the New Jersey League of Municipalities (NJLM) and the New Jersey Conference of Mayors (NJCM)—led by bipartisan mayors—are actively opposing these measures as detrimental to local municipal control.

The Mayor reminded residents that nearly 90% of the Borough’s annual budget is dictated by state law. He noted that while compliance with affordable housing mandates is non-negotiable, the Borough's proactive planning puts it in a much stronger position than surrounding towns.

He also highlighted that the Borough recently sent notices to residents offering grant funding to replace private galvanized water lines at no cost to homeowners. He noted that the Borough’s water system infrastructure remains exceptionally strong, to the extent that private water utility companies continuously offer to purchase it.

Adjournment

Motion to adjourn was made by Council President Binkoski and seconded by Councilwoman Wickenheisser. The motion was approved via voice vote.

July 20, 2026

ATTEST:

BOROUGH OF WHARTON

WILLIAM J. CHEGWIDDEN,
MAYOR

Cheryl Muzzillo,
Borough Clerk