



MINUTES

HUNTERDON COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Commissioner Meeting Room
71 Main Street, Building 1, Second Floor
Flemington, New Jersey 08822

April 21, 2026

I. **5:00 p.m. CONVENE:**

II. **EXECUTIVE SESSION**

1. Resolution Entering into Executive Session.

Motion: By: Shaun Van Doren **Seconded:** Zachary Rich

Yes: John Lanza, Jeff Kuhl, Zachary Rich, Susan Soloway, Shaun Van Doren

No: None **Abstain:** None **Absent:**

III. **5:30 p.m. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

IV. **MOMENT OF SILENCE**

V. **REPORT FROM COUNTY COUNSEL ON EXECUTIVE SESSION**

VI. **COMMISSIONER REPORTS**

Commissioner Soloway reported on the launch of the 2026 Veterans Headstone Cleaning Program, through the County's VSO Office. The program invites volunteers of all ages to clean and restore veterans' headstones at cemeteries across Hunterdon County, with events scheduled from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. on May 2, June 6, October 17, and November 7, with noted rain dates. Residents may RSVP by emailing ecarrier@co.hunterdon.nj.us. Commissioner Soloway also shared that on April 11, 2026, she joined Commissioner Shaun Van Doren and Raritan Township Committeewoman Robyn Fatooh at the opening of the Flemington Fairy Trail at Tuccamirgan Park, where they contributed handmade fairy houses alongside more than 100 community submissions. Appreciation was extended to Clerk to the Board Rebecca Groghans for crafting Commissioner Van Doren's fairy house. The event, supported by Girl Scout Troop 80882 and Service Unit 84, was highlighted as a successful community partnership engaging residents of all ages.

Commissioner Rich liaison to Hunterdon County Polytech, congratulated Polytech and Academies students inducted into the National Technical Honor Society at last week's ceremony, where the Academies also named Dr. Ruben Parhik as the 2026 honorary chapter member for his longstanding support of the Biomedical Sciences Academy and his role in establishing the Hunterdon Health Hero Awards. As liaison to the Cultural and Heritage Commission, Commissioner Rich announced the arrival of the New Jersey State Teen Arts Festival Touring Exhibition at the Historic Courthouse on April 22, featuring artwork from several Hunterdon County students. He further noted that the 2026 Hunterdon County Teen Arts Festival will take place on April 29 at the Route 12 County Complex, bringing together students countywide to celebrate artistic achievement.

Commissioner Van Doren provided updates from the Department of Human Services, noting that the Senior Center will hold its Spring Appliance Day on April 28 from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m., offering free labor for small appliance repairs for residents aged 60 and over. He reported that on May 5 the Senior Center will host two presentations: a 1:30 p.m. session by the Senior Medicare Patrol on preventing Medicare fraud, followed

by a 3:00 p.m. “Coffee with the Clerk” with County Clerk Mary Melfi covering deed fraud, passport services, and voting information; residents are asked to register by April 28. Additionally, in his role as liaison to the County’s 250th anniversary celebrations, he announced that invitations have been sent to all 26 mayors to participate in the County-wide parade on June 14, co-hosted by Clerk Melfi and Chamber President Chris Phelan, featuring floats, a George Washington reenactor, and military brigades.

Deputy Director Kuhl reported on activities within the Department of Public Safety, noting a recent visit to the County Communications Center during National Public Safety Telecommunicators Week (April 12–18) to recognize 911 dispatchers and provide lunch on behalf of the Board. He highlighted the March 19 transition of Hunterdon County 911 Communications to the State’s Next Generation 911 system, improving information-sharing and text-to-911 capabilities. Deputy Director Kuhl also summarized recent emergency responses, including the April 7 HazMat operation in Union Township involving a compressed natural gas-powered truck that struck a railroad overpass, and the April 17 deployment of the Urban Search and Rescue Team in Delaware Township to stabilize a residence damaged by a vehicle collision, noting the high professionalism and expertise demonstrated in both incidents.

Director Lanza reported on preparations for the 25th anniversary of the September 11 attacks, noting that the Board, in partnership with Sheriff Fred Brown, is planning a remembrance ceremony at Hilltop Preserve on September 11 and advancing work on a permanent memorial through a requisition included on the agenda. He clarified that farming operations at the site will continue uninterrupted and that the memorial—featuring a natural walking perimeter and a small reflection pavilion—has been discussed with the farmer and nearby property owners to ensure compatibility with the land’s agricultural character. Director Lanza also highlighted Hilltop Preserve’s historic significance as a location where residents witnessed smoke from the World Trade Center on 9/11. Additionally, he announced the introduction of the Fiscal Year 2026 County budget, thanking Commissioners Van Doren and Rich and staff for their work, and noted that the budget maintains last year’s tax rate cut and marks the County’s 12th consecutive debt-free year, reflecting strong fiscal management and continued support for residents’ affordability concerns.

VII. PROCLAMATIONS/RECOGNITION

1. Recognizing April 12 through April 18, 2026 as National Public Safety Telecommunicators Week.
Mr. Pat Horsch, Division Head of Communications thanked the Board and introduced Lara Komoroski, Professional Development Coordinator. Ms. Komoroski shared an overview of the diligence of Hunterdon County public safety dispatchers.
Motion: By: Jeff Kuhl **Seconded:** Zachary Rich
Yes: John Lanza, Jeff Kuhl, Zachary Rich, Susan Soloway, Shaun Van Doren
No: None **Abstain:** None **Absent:**
2. Honoring a Decade of Excellence at the Woolverton Inn.
Mary Passalacqua, owner of the Woolverton Inn thanked the Board for honoring and recognizing the Woolverton Inn upon its 10-year anniversary. She shared a brief history and overview of the work her and Mario have completed during their ownership.
Motion: By: Susan Soloway **Seconded:** Zachary Rich
Yes: John Lanza, Jeff Kuhl, Zachary Rich, Susan Soloway, Shaun Van Doren
No: None **Abstain:** None **Absent:**
3. Proclaiming Friday, April 24, 2026, as the 154th Anniversary Celebration of Arbor Day in the County of Hunterdon.
Mr. Dan Bush, Director of Public Works and member of the Shade Tree Commission, spoke to the *Grove of 13* that was planted at the Arboretum Gardens in honor of the 250th of the United States.
Motion: By: Shaun Van Doren **Seconded:** Jeff Kuhl
Yes: John Lanza, Jeff Kuhl, Zachary Rich, Susan Soloway, Shaun Van Doren
No: None **Abstain:** None **Absent:**
4. Recognizing April 19 through April 25, 2026, as National Crime Victims’ Rights Week.
Prosecutor Renée Robeson thanked the Commissioner Board for recognizing Crime

Victims' Rights Week and shared that this year marks the 45th annual national observance. Prosecutor Robeson added the theme for 2026 is *Listen. Act. Advocate. Protect victims, serve communities.* Prosecutor Renée Robeson shared how the Hunterdon County Prosecutor's Office is an serves by this motto not only during Crime Victims' Rights week, but year round.

Motion: By: Susan Soloway **Seconded:** Zachary Rich

Yes: John Lanza, Jeff Kuhl, Zachary Rich, Susan Soloway, Shaun Van Doren

No: None **Abstain:** None **Absent:**

5. Recognizing Michael Giannouris, a dedicated member of Scouts Troop 65, upon achieving the rank of Eagle Scout.

6. Recognizing Jonathan Harvey, a dedicated member of Scouts Troop 65, upon achieving the rank of Eagle Scout.

Motion: To prove Proclamations # 5 & 6

By: Shaun Van Doren **Seconded:** Jeff Kuhl

Yes: John Lanza, Jeff Kuhl, Zachary Rich, Susan Soloway, Shaun Van Doren

No: None **Abstain:** None **Absent:**

VIII. **PUBLIC COMMENT, Limited to 2 minutes per person.**

(Comments exceeding 2 minutes will be entertained later in the agenda)

No public comments.

IX. **FINANCE, Andrew Bernath, CFO**

1. Adoption of Hunterdon County Resolution to exceed the County budget appropriation limits and to establish a cap bank.

Motion: By: Susan Soloway **Seconded:** Shaun Van Doren

Yes: John Lanza, Jeff Kuhl, Zachary Rich, Susan Soloway, Shaun Van Doren

No: None **Abstain:** None **Absent:**

2. Certification of Compliance with the United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's Enforcement Guidance under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Motion: By: Jeff Kuhl **Seconded:** Zachary Rich

Yes: John Lanza, Jeff Kuhl, Zachary Rich, Susan Soloway, Shaun Van Doren

No: None **Abstain:** None **Absent:**

3. Approval of the "2026 Budget Statement Certification by Welfare Agency" and authorizing the Commissioner Director to sign on behalf of the County.

Motion: By: Shaun Van Doren **Seconded:** Susan Soloway

Yes: John Lanza, Jeff Kuhl, Zachary Rich, Susan Soloway, Shaun Van Doren

No: None **Abstain:** None **Absent:**

4. Authorizing county entity (Board of Elections) to exceed the county entity budget request cap (P.L. 2015, c.249).

Motion: By: Zachary Rich **Seconded:** Jeff Kuhl

Yes: John Lanza, Jeff Kuhl, Zachary Rich, Susan Soloway, Shaun Van Doren

No: None **Abstain:** None **Absent:**

5. Authorizing county entity (Board of Taxation) to exceed the county entity budget request cap (P.L. 2015, c.249).

Motion: By: Susan Soloway **Seconded:** Zachary Rich

Yes: John Lanza, Jeff Kuhl, Zachary Rich, Susan Soloway, Shaun Van Doren

No: None **Abstain:** None **Absent:**

6. Authorizing county entity (Prosecutor's Office) to exceed the county entity budget request cap (P.L. 2015, c.249).

Motion: By: Shaun Van Doren **Seconded:** Zachary Rich

Yes: John Lanza, Jeff Kuhl, Zachary Rich, Susan Soloway, Shaun Van Doren

No: None **Abstain:** None **Absent:**

7. Authorizing county entity (Sheriff's Office) to exceed the county entity budget request cap (P.L. 2015, c.249).

Motion: By: Jeff Kuhl **Seconded:** Zachary Rich
Yes: John Lanza, Jeff Kuhl, Zachary Rich, Susan Soloway, Shaun Van Doren
No: None **Abstain:** None **Absent:**

8. Authorizing the 2026 Budget to be read by title only.
Motion: By: Susan Soloway **Seconded:** Jeff Kuhl
Yes: John Lanza, Jeff Kuhl, Zachary Rich, Susan Soloway, Shaun Van Doren
No: None **Abstain:** None **Absent:**

9. Introduction of the 2026 Hunterdon County Budget.
Motion: By: Shaun Van Doren **Seconded:** Zachary Rich
Yes: John Lanza, Jeff Kuhl, Zachary Rich, Susan Soloway, Shaun Van Doren
No: None **Abstain:** None **Absent:**

The public hearing and adoption of the 2026 County Budget is schedule for May 19, 2026 at 5:30 p.m. at the County Administration Building

X. **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & TOURISM, Director Marc Saluk**

1. Approving a contract for County RFP 0017-2026, with Percepture Incorporated for 2026 Explore Hunterdon Tourism Marketing Services, in the amount of \$150,000.00.
Motion: By: Susan Soloway **Seconded:** Jeff Kuhl
Yes: John Lanza, Jeff Kuhl, Zachary Rich, Susan Soloway, Shaun Van Doren
No: None **Abstain:** None **Absent:**

XI. **PURCHASING, Ray Rule, QPA**

1. Approving contract amendment #1, with Holman Frenia Allison, P.C. for County RFP 0055-2023, Accounting and Consulting Services for the American Rescue Plan Program, in an amount not to exceed \$30,000.00.
Motion: By: Shaun Van Doren **Seconded:** Zachary Rich
Yes: John Lanza, Jeff Kuhl, Zachary Rich, Susan Soloway, Shaun Van Doren
No: None **Abstain:** None **Absent:**
2. Approving Requisition #R26-2856 with Ben Schaffer Recreation Inc., for the Hilltop Preserve park structures, in an amount not to exceed \$158,250.71.
Motion: By: Jeff Kuhl **Seconded:** Susan Soloway
Yes: John Lanza, Jeff Kuhl, Zachary Rich, Susan Soloway, Shaun Van Doren
No: None **Abstain:** None **Absent:**

XII. **CONSENT AGENDA**

Motion: To approve the Consent Agenda excluding Resolution #2
By: Shaun Van Doren **Seconded:** Zachary Rich
Yes: John Lanza, Jeff Kuhl, Zachary Rich, Susan Soloway, Shaun Van Doren
No: None **Abstain:** None **Absent:**

1. Approving the Claims Register dated April 21, 2026.
3. Approving the salaries and hourly rates for those employees covered under the collective bargaining agreement with the Communication Workers of America (CWA) Local 1036, Rank & File and the County of Hunterdon.
4. Approving the salaries and hourly rates for those employees covered under the collective bargaining agreement with the Communication Workers of America (CWA) Local 1036, Supervisors and the County of Hunterdon.
5. Approving the salaries and hourly rates for the Division of Social Services, covered by the collective bargaining agreement with the Communication Workers of America (CWA) Local 1036, Rank & File and the County of Hunterdon.

6. Approving the salaries and hourly rates for the Division of Social Services, covered by the collective bargaining agreement with the Communication Workers of America (CWA) Local 1036, Supervisors and the County of Hunterdon.
7. Approving the salaries and hourly rates for the unclassified/unaffiliated or non-contractual employees for the County of Hunterdon.
8. Approving the hire and regular appointment of Garrett Rush as a Laborer 1 in the Hunterdon County Department of Public Works, Division of Roads. (Filling a vacancy)
9. Approving the hire and regular appointment of Sean Crane as a Laborer 1 in the Hunterdon County Department of Public Works, Division of Bridges. (Filling a vacancy)
10. Approving the appointment of Loretta Dienes as a part-time, per diem Fitness Instructor in the Department of Human Services, Division of Senior Disabilities and Veteran Services. (Filling a vacancy)
11. Approving the provisional promotion of Maria DeSousa, to the title of Public Health Nurse in the Department of Health, Public Health Nursing Division.
12. Approving the action to hereby grant Jeff P. Newman a regular appointment as a full-time Storekeeper 1 as of April 21, 2026, in the Hunterdon County Department of Administrative Services, Division of Vehicle Services. (No change in salary)
13. Acknowledging the action of the Hunterdon County Prosecutor, Renée M. Robeson, to increase the hours and the hourly rate for Kristen Larsen, Prosecutors Agent, in the Hunterdon County Prosecutor's Office.
14. Authorizing the Hunterdon County Qualified Purchasing Agent to initiate competitive contracting for the Area Agency on Aging Programs, for the Department of Human Services pursuant to N.J.S.A.40A:11-4.3(a).
15. Approving a request from the Hunterdon Choral Alliance, to hold a rehearsal and meeting in the Hunterdon County Historic Courthouse on Saturday, May 30, 2026, and waive the fees associated with this facility.
16. Approving a request from Raritan River Music, to host the Raritan River Music Festival in the Hunterdon County Historic Courthouse on Saturday, May 2, 2026, and waive the fees associated with this facility.
17. Authorizing the Health Department to apply for and accept the Local Core Capacity for Public Health Emergency Preparedness (LINCS) Grant in the amount of \$276,491.00 for the period July 1, 2026 through June 30, 2027.
18. Authorizing the Health Department to apply for and accept the Overdose Fatality Review Team (OFRT) Grant in the amount of \$75,000.00, for the period July 1, 2026 through June 30, 2027.
19. Approving a request from Team Somerset / Somerset Wheelmen to host a bicycling event on County Route 629 (Pleasant Run Road) in the Township of Readington on Saturday, June 6, 2025.
20. Approving a request from the Calfon Parks & Recreation Committee to host a Memorial Day Parade on Monday, May 25, 2026, from 10:45 a.m. until 12:00 p.m. utilizing County Route 512, and to hang a banner on the facings of the bridge beginning May 01, 2026 until May 31, 2026.
21. Authorizing the Director or Deputy Director and Clerk to the Board of County Commissioners to sign an Interlocal Public Health Services Agreement with the Township of Union.

22. Authorizing the Director or Deputy Director and Clerk to the Board of County Commissioners to sign an Interlocal Public Health Services Agreement with the Borough of Glen Gardner.
 23. Authorize the Director or Deputy Director to sign an Agreement with the Township of Clinton for the purchase and installation of two actuated LED enhanced pedestrian crossing signs at the intersection of County Route 626 and Maple Avenue in the Township of Clinton.
 24. Authorizing the Director or Deputy Director to execute a provider services contract with Freedom House for the provision of community-based services pertaining to opioid prevention, treatment, and recovery strategies known as W. Hill Road Recovery Housing and W. Hill Road Recovery Housing Vehicle pursuant to the terms and conditions set forth the Department of Human Services Request for Proposals 0038-2025, for the period of January 1, 2026, through December 31, 2026, in an amount not-to-exceed of \$154,775.00.
 25. Amending Resolution 2026-268; Approving a Contract Award to Mecor Inc., for the Resurfacing of County Route 650 in the Township of Raritan.
2. Approving the executive session and regular meeting minutes from the April 07, 2026 meeting.
Motion: By: Shaun Van Doren **Seconded:** Susan Soloway
Yes: Jeff Kuhl, Zachary Rich, Susan Soloway, Shaun Van Doren
No: None **Abstain:** John Lanza **Absent:**

XIII. OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Mr. Guy Citron, a resident of Tewksbury Township referenced questions he asked during the Board's previous meeting regarding statements by Assemblyman Erik Peterson and reiterated concerns about rhetoric related to hate speech, election legitimacy, and immigration. Mr. Citron urged the Board to provide thoughtful leadership and a constructive, civil response to issues affecting the community.

Mr. Manish Patel introduced himself as a longtime New Jersey resident, currently living in Bridgewater, with past ties to Washington, Flemington, and Annandale, noting over 20 years of familiarity with the region. He explained he was invited by Mr. Citron and initially intended to respond to comments made by Mr. Peterson, who he identified as his legislative representative. Mr. Patel shared his personal background as the son of immigrants from India. His father arrived in 1970 with aspirations for opportunity, later bringing the family in 1972. He emphasized his father's contributions as an architect, including building theaters, auditoriums, schools, and founding a Hindu community center and temple in Garfield, New Jersey. He expressed deep appreciation for New Jersey, stating he has spent most of his life in the state and chose to remain even after considering relocating. Mr. Patel highlighted several remarks attributed to Mr. Peterson (e.g., "send them back," "third world mentality," "mass invasion from the third world"), stating these comments were hurtful, offensive, and damaging. He discussed the impact of such rhetoric on his daily life, including feeling compelled to carry a passport card due to perceived changes in policy and environment, despite his education and long-standing ties to the country. Mr. Patel rejected implications of privilege and emphasized his family's hard work and contributions, noting his father came to build a life—not to seek "free stuff." He acknowledged and appreciated prior comments made to Mr. Citron but urged greater awareness and accountability regarding the impact of such statements. Mr. Patel expressed that he is no longer angry but fearful for himself and his children, questioning why individuals like him feel the need to carry identification such as passport cards due to the current climate. He concluded by sharing the work the Commissioner Board is doing is invaluable and the bureaucracy is what keeps us safe and healthy.

Deputy Director Kuhl congratulated Manish Patel and his family on achieving the American dream. He acknowledged that Mr. Peterson is a resident of Hunterdon County, but emphasized that the county has approximately 130,000 residents with diverse viewpoints. He stated that comments made by individual residents do not reflect the

beliefs or positions of the County Commissioner Board. Deputy Director Kuhl expressed concern over the implication that the Commissioner Board shares or supports Mr. Peterson's views, clarifying that this is not the case.

Manish Patel stated he is not implying the Commissioner Board feels that way. However, statements like the ones Mr. Peterson made can be detrimental to the Hunterdon County "brand" and deter visitors if comments such as these are associated with Hunterdon County. He brings this up as a matter of awareness, not criticism.

Ms. Rochelle Torres, a resident of Tewksbury, addressed the board by acknowledging their position and clarifying she was not criticizing them directly but offering a constructive suggestion. She encouraged the Commissioners, in their personal capacity, to consider reaching out to Assemblyman Peterson regarding the controversial remarks to express that such comments are not helpful from a representative. She also suggested issuing general public statements that emphasize unity and support for all community members—without directly referencing Mr. Peterson—to reinforce that those views do not represent the broader community. Ms. Torres stressed the importance of unity, noting that divisive rhetoric can contribute to broader harm, including increased hate incidents and community tension. She expressed frustration that such issues are being raised instead of focusing solely on core governmental priorities, but acknowledged that the impact of harmful speech makes it a relevant concern. She concluded by urging leadership to help counterbalance negativity with inclusive messaging, emphasizing that even neutral, positive statements of support can carry significant weight and help maintain a safe, unified, and thriving community.

Commissioner Director Lanza stated that, based on his experience serving with the Board, he does not believe any members have made derogatory remarks about immigrants, either publicly or privately, and expressed pride in their character and conduct. He acknowledged the broader immigrant experience, referencing his own family history, and noted that challenges faced by newcomers are not unfamiliar. He emphasized that the Board cannot be held accountable for statements made by individuals who are not members, including those of Assemblyman Peterson, and declined to comment on such remarks. He encouraged concerned individuals to address those comments directly with the person responsible. Director Lanza reiterated that the Board represents approximately 130,000 residents and cannot control what all individuals say, stressing that he is accountable only for his own statements and welcomes scrutiny of his words in the appropriate forum.

Karen Peckala, a resident of Delaware Township, stated she had not initially planned to speak but felt compelled to do so in response to remarks made by a representative associated with Hunterdon County. She requested that the Commissioners issue an official statement addressing what she described as discriminatory, divisive, and exclusionary comments, and to clearly affirm that such views do not represent the county or its leadership. Ms. Peckala emphasized the importance of inclusivity and the need for the county to represent all residents, noting that silence can convey an unintended message. Drawing from her corporate experience, she highlighted the responsibility representatives have to uphold standards in both public and private communications. She concluded by reiterating her request for a formal statement to reinforce community values and accountability, and thanked the Commissioners for their time.

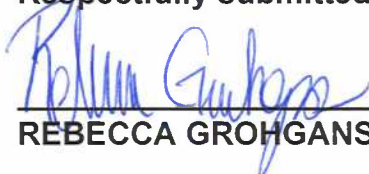
XIV. ADDITIONAL COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

XV. EXECUTIVE SESSION (Reconvene if necessary)

XVI. ADJOURNMENT

The Board adjourned at 6:55 p.m. on a motion by Commissioner Van Doren, seconded by Deputy Director Kuhl, followed by a voice carry.

Respectfully submitted and transcribed by:


REBECCA GROHGANS, CLERK