



CITY OF MILFORD
CITY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES
May 12, 2025

The City Council of the City of Milford met in the Joseph Ronnie Rogers Council Chambers in Regular Session on Monday, May 12, 2025.

PRESIDING: Mayor F. Todd Culotta

IN ATTENDANCE: Councilmembers Daniel Marabello, Madula Kalesis, Lori Connor, Nadia Zychal, Michael Stewart, Danny Perez, Katrina Wilson and Jason James, Sr.

STAFF: City Manager Mark Whitfield, Sgt Timothy Maloney, and City Clerk Katrina White

COUNSEL: Solicitor David Rutt, Esquire

Public Comment Period

Solicitor Rutt read the rules of the Public Comment Period.

Terry Rogers, DMI President, 20235 Fleatown Road, Lincoln, DE 19960, introduced Sada Truitt who is the new Downtown Milford Inc coordinator.

Ms. Truitt expressed excitement about working with downtown Milford to help revitalize and sustain it. She recently had a meeting with the Mayor and city staff and is ready to do great work for the city.

Kim Wills, 2 Sunset Lane, Milford, DE 19963 was present and was concerned about the proposed starting salary for a new City Manager, speaking against paying the top salary from the beginning. She highlighted that the current City Manager has received a \$40,000 pay increase in recent years, and questioned how high the salary will go if the starting pay is set at \$195,000.

Call to Order - Mayor F. Todd Culotta

Mayor Culotta called the regular meeting to order at 6:03 pm.

Roll Call

Roll Call showed that there were eight members present. Councilmember Stewart was not present at that time and would be in attendance later.

Invocation and Pledge of Allegiance

The invocation was given by Councilmember Wilson followed by The Pledge of Allegiance that was led by Boys Scout Troop 186 who were in attendance to observe a City Council Meeting to obtain a merit badge.

Approval of the Agenda

Councilmember Kalesis made the motion to approve the agenda. Councilmember Zychal seconded.

The motion carried unanimously. 7-0

Approval of Previous Minutes

Councilmember Kalesis made the motion to approve the April 28, 2025, and the May 1, 2025, meeting minutes. Councilmember James seconded.

The motion carried unanimously. 7-0

[2025 05 01 Special Meeting Minutes](#) 

[2025 04 28 Council Minutes](#) 

Recognition

Proclamation 2025-07 Coast Guard Safe Boating Week

City Clerk White read Proclamation 2025-07 that promoted National Safe Boating Week

[2025 07 National Safe Boating Week May 18-24 2025](#) 

Proclamation 2025-08 National Public Works Week

City Manager Whitfield read Proclamation 2025-08 that honored our public works professionals, engineers, managers, and employees for their contributions to our community.

[2025 08 National Public Works Week May 18-24 2025](#) 

Staff Reports

Police Report

Councilmember Wilson reviewed the police report that was included in the packet. She highlighted a significant achievement by the Milford Police Department: 14 officers received

the Sussex County Phoenix Award for their life-saving efforts involving cardiac arrest victims over the past year.

Councilmember Marabello made the motion to approve the Police Report. Councilmember Kalesis seconded.

Yes Danny Perez, Madula Kalesis, Daniel Marabello, Lori Connor, Nadia Zychal, Katrina Wilson, and Jason James

The motion carried unanimously. 7-0

[Police Report April 2025](#) 

City Clerk

City Clerk White reviewed the City Clerk Report that was included in the packet.

Councilmember Wilson made the motion to approve the city clerk report. Councilmember Zychal seconded.

Yes Danny Perez, Madula Kalesis, Daniel Marabello, Lori Connor, Nadia Zychal, Katrina Wilson, and Jason James

The motion carried unanimously. 7-0

[City Clerk Report April 2025](#) 

City Manager

City Manager Mark Whitfield reviewed the City Manager's Report that was included in the packet.

Councilmember Wilson made the motion to approve the city manager's report that included the departmental reports. Councilmember Connor seconded.

Yes Danny Perez, Madula Kalesis, Daniel Marabello, Lori Connor, Nadia Zychal, Katrina Wilson, and Jason James

The motion carried unanimously. 7-0

[City Manager Report April 2025](#) 

Public Works

Public Works Director Willis Shaffer reviewed the Public Works report that was included in the packet.

[Public Works Report April 2025](#) 

Electric

Electric Director Tony Chipola reviewed the electric report that was included in the packet.

[Electric Report April 2025](#) 

Planning & Zoning

Planning Director Rob Pierce reviewed the Planning and Zoning report that was included in the packet.

[Planning & Zoning Report April 2025\(2\)](#) 

Parks & Recreation

Parks & Recreation Director Brad Dennehy reviewed the parks & recreation report that was included in the packet.

[Milford Parks & Rec Report April 2025](#) 

Human Resources

Human Resources Jamesha Williams reviewed the human resources report that was included in the packet.

[HR Report April 2025](#) 

Economic Development & Community Engagement

Economic Development & Community Engagement Administrator Lauren Swain reviewed the Economic Development & Community Engagement report that was included in the packet.

[Econ Dev & Community Engagement Report April 2025](#) 

Information Technology

City Manager referenced the IT Report in IT Director Bill Pettigrew's absence.

[IT Report May 2025](#) 

Finance

Lou Vitola, Senior Accountant, reviewed the finance report that was included in the packet.

[Finance Report April 2025](#) 

Monthly Finance Report

Lou Vitola, Senior Accountant, reviewed the finance report that was included in the packet. He reported that the past month saw stable financial performance with a slight dip of \$400,000 in total cash, primarily due to reserves being used for project activity, notably the 2024 streets project. Both the Enterprise Funds' and General Fund's Profit & Loss statements showed improvement compared to the previous month. This positive trend is attributed to the continued strong performance of utilities against both budget and last year's figures, as well as lower-than-expected operational and maintenance (O&M) and personnel expenses on the General Government side. This improvement is most evident on Lines 12 and 13 of the general fund P&L report when compared to the same period last year.

Councilmember Kalesis made the motion to accept the Monthly Finance Report for March 2025. Councilmember Connor seconded.

Yes Danny Perez, Madula Kalesis, Daniel Marabello, Lori Connor, Nadia Zychal, Katrina Wilson, and Jason James

The motion carried unanimously. 7-0

[Finance Report - Mar 2025](#) 

Communications & Correspondence

Heather Content, DMEC Director of Government & Community Relations, extended the invitation to council for the DEMEC Joint Meeting on June 3, 2025. Kimberly Schlichting, DEMEC President and CEO, will be giving an update on legislative and regulatory changes.

Councilmember Kalesis reported that she was contacted by Brian Beachaver who came previously to meeting to discuss the need for sidewalks and crosswalks around Lulu Ross Elementary. She believes crosswalks could be a doable project, potentially for next year's budget. Although Mr. Beachaver wants immediate action, she acknowledges this isn't feasible but wants to ensure everyone considers the safety concern of children walking to school without crosswalks, suggesting it be a topic for next year's budget discussions.

Councilmember James received a call from a resident who was concerned about an abandoned, unmaintained property on Rogers Drive that had been neglected for some time

and wanted to understand the code enforcement process. He reported that the previous owner stated that a city easement made the city responsible for yard maintenance. Director Pierce stated that it sounded familiar and believed that code enforcement had already spoken with the current property owner regarding the issue.

Mayor Culotta announced that Local Government Legislative Day to meet with the Lt. Governor would be the next day at Legislative Hall in Dover.

Unfinished Business

There was no unfinished business.

New Business

POLCO Presentation

Brandon Barnett, The NCS, reviewed the POLCO Survey Presentation that was included in the packet. He gave a summary of the findings from the Milford National Community Survey.

Councilmember Stewart joined the meeting at 6:53 pm.

[NCS Presentation Milford DE 2025](#) 

Authorization/ DELDOT MOU/Red Light Camera Proposal

Matt Buckley & Dustin Shane, DelDOT, gave a presentation on the program and reviewed the proposal that was included in the packet.

Councilmember Zychal made the motion to authorize the city manager to work on a Memorandum of Understanding with DelDOT. Councilmember Wilson seconded.

Yes Danny Perez, Madula Kalesis, Daniel Marabello, Lori Connor, Nadia Zychal, Michael Stewart, Katrina Wilson, and Jason James

The motion carried unanimously. 8-0

[Milford ERLSP 2025 05 12](#) 

Authorization/Tyler Payments Contract Amendment/EP&L Credit Card Fees

Director Pierce explained that with the current Tyler payments contract the city is currently required to absorb credit card fees associated with transactions through the EP&L Module which includes building permits, utility permits, land use applications, licenses and code enforcement invoices. The projected impact of leaving the contract as is and absorbing credit card fees will be approximately \$45,000 a year, which could go up and down depending on card utilization.

Councilmember James made the motion for council to authorize the mayor to sign the contract amendment which would establish a service fee for credit card payments made on enterprise permitting and licensing transactions. No additional funding is required for this authorization. Councilmember Wilson seconded.

Yes Danny Perez, Madula Kalesis, Daniel Marabello, Lori Connor, Nadia Zychal, Michael Stewart, Katrina Wilson, and Jason James

The motion carried unanimously. 8-0

[Tyler Payments - Contract Amendment - 051225](#) 

Discussion/Downtown Development District (DDD) Application

Director Pierce stated that no action was required from council and reviewed the DDD Application presentation that was included in the packet.

Mayor Culotta stated that the program is phenomenal. He has used it twice and it does put a dent in the cost of your project.

[DDD - Renewal - 051425](#) 

Ordinance Introductions:

Ordinance 2025-08 Comp Plan Amendment

Director Pierce introduced 2025-08 that was included in the packet.

[Samsel - Comp Plan - Packet](#) 

Ordinance 2025-10 Comp Plan/Samsel/Zoning Change

Director Pierce introduced 2025-10 that was included in the packet.

[Samsel - Packet](#) 

Ordinance 2025-09 111 North Walnut LLC/Conditional Use

Director Pierce introduced 2025-08 that was included in the packet.

[111 N Walnut, LLC - CU - Packet](#) 

Authorization/City Manager Salary*

City manager Whitfield reviewed the memo that was included in the packet. On May 1, 2025, the Special Council Meeting resulted in a 7-1 vote authorizing the City Manager, HR Director, and recruiter to offer City Manager candidate #2 an initial salary of \$180,000. The candidate has requested a consideration of a starting salary of \$195,000 per year instead. Since that time Staff has pulled together the following information. The existing City manager's salary is \$189,758. Under the current contract, he was due a merit increase on January 1st. He explained that due to the pending retirement performance review was not pursued for the pay increase. Had the pay increase been at 3% merit increase on January 1st present, salary would be \$195,451, which would be in line. He presented a salary survey of city managers across Delaware of note.

Councilmember Zychal made the motion to recommend City Council amend the action of May 1, 2025 and authorize the City Manager, Hr. Director and recruiter to negotiate the contract with Candidate number 2, with a starting pay not to exceed \$195,000, commensurate in consideration of his 30 years of municipal experience which justifies that salary. Councilmember Marabello seconded.

Councilmember Kalesis spoke against the proposed \$195,000 starting salary for a potential City Manager, comparing it to other Delaware cities. She stated that Middletown's City Manager earns \$204,000 but serves a population of 24,000. Smyrna's City Manager earns \$194,000 for a population closer to Milford's (12,000), but Smyrna recently raised taxes to cover a deficit, and their City Manager also serves as Police Chief. She stated that Newark's City Manager earns \$184,000 for a population of 30,000. She is not in favor of starting someone at \$195,000, given that the candidate, despite potentially having 30 years of experience, lacks experience in Milford and has no background in utilities or public works, and that there will be a learning curve.

Councilmember James offered for clarification that could be independently verified, that the Smyrna Police Chief has been acting as City Manager, but those two roles are in the process of being separated as Smyrna is currently hiring a new police chief.

Councilmember Wilson acknowledged that \$195,000 is a significant salary, however, she is comfortable offering this amount because the city needs a knowledgeable, qualified, and reputable person to lead Milford. She highlighted that Milford has a history of conducting pay grade studies to ensure competitive salaries, as the city was once below market rate. Given Milford's rapid growth and projected population increase to 15,000 residents soon, she believes it's crucial to be proactive in securing a highly qualified individual who can effectively manage the city and is excited about the candidate's potential experience as an accountant,

which she sees as a benefit. She also made reference to the current City Manager's hiring, who came from Public Works. She recalled having to trust his knowledge and accept his lack of experience in certain areas while being overqualified in others. She stated that the success of the current City Manager, and the comfort of knowing that his 3% annual raise would likely be approved, gives her confidence that this new candidate's proposed salary is definitely within range. She stated that the goal is to make a strong offer to a person who can take Milford to the next level as the city continues to move forward.

Councilmember James wanted to make it explicitly clear for the public and the meeting minutes that even if the proposed salary increase was approved by the Council, it will NOT necessitate a tax increase for Milford residents. He explained that the funds for this salary are already budgeted and would not exceed what was allocated for the current City Manager. He said that he wanted to prevent any misconception that Council approval of this salary would lead to a tax increase.

Councilmember Marabello spoke in regard to concern about a learning curve for a new City Manager, he emphasized that with a budget of over \$60 million, the city needs the best possible leader. He is confident that any new leader can quickly learn the local specifics and people due to the presence of supportive department heads who will ensure that the city continues to function smoothly, thanks to the current city manager.

Councilmember Stewart expressed concern about the proposed salary for a new City Manager, especially given Milford's average household income of \$55,000. While acknowledging that the City Manager oversees daily operations, he is hesitant to pay top dollar to someone who is new to Milford and its specific ways. He believes this individual needs to prove themselves to justify such a salary. He explained that at his job he started from the bottom, worked his way up and as he proved himself the increased salary came. So, paying someone top dollar because they want it isn't realistic to him.

Councilmember Connor offered a "food for thought" argument against paying the higher salary. She used an analogy of choosing between two equally qualified contractors for her own home, one costing \$180,000 and another \$195,000, she stated that she wouldn't spend the extra \$15,000. She said that she viewed it as financially irresponsible to approve the higher \$195,000 salary for the City Manager when using public funds.

Councilmember Zychal expressed that years of experience, particularly 30 years in public service, and that acting in good faith for the public good means something. She challenged the Council's ethical considerations, questioning whether it's in the city's best interest to

"quibble" over a salary within the publicly stated range, especially after a lengthy interview process. She stated that attempts to lowball or strategically maneuver for a less qualified candidate are unethical. She urged the others to strongly consider their ethics when making this decision.

Councilmember James wanted to clarify for the public that the advertised salary range for the City Manager position was \$160,000 to \$197,000. The current recommendation in the memo is to negotiate a starting pay not exceeding \$195,000.

Yes Daniel Marabello, Nadia Zychal, Katrina Wilson, and Jason James

No Madula Kalesis, Lori Connor, and Michael Stewart

Abstain Danny Perez - He stated that as a new council member, he was not present for the candidate interviews. Due to his absence during that process, he believes it would be improper for him to vote either for or against the issue at hand.

The motion carried 4 yes, 3 no, 1 abstain. 4-3-1

Councilmember Kalesis left the meeting at 8:07pm.

[City Manager Salary](#) 

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Motion to Recess into Executive Session

Mayor Culotta asked or a motion to move into Executive Session at 8:07 pm

Pursuant to 29 Del. C. §10004(b)(2) Preliminary discussions on site acquisitions for any publicly funded capital improvements, or sales or leases of real property

Pursuant to 29 Del. C. §10004(b)(9) Personnel matters in which the names, competency and abilities of individual employees or students are discussed

Councilmember Zychal made the motion to move into executive Session. Councilmember James seconded.

Yes Danny Perez, Daniel Marabello, Lori Connor, Nadia Zychal, Michael Stewart, Katrina Wilson, and Jason James

The motion carried unanimously. 7-0

Return to Open Session

Mayor Culotta asked for a motion to return to open session at 8:16pm.

Potential Motion/Real Estate

Councilmember James made a motion to authorize the city manager to conduct discussions based on the property that was discussed in Executive Session.

Yes Danny Perez, Daniel Marabello, Lori Connor, Nadia Zychal, Michael Stewart, Katrina Wilson, and Jason James

The motion carried. 7-0

Potential Motion /Personnel

There was no discussion or motion on Personnel.

Adjournment

Councilmember Marabello made the motion to adjourn. Councilmember Wilson seconded.

Yes Danny Perez, Daniel Marabello, Lori Connor, Nadia Zychal, Michael Stewart, Katrina Wilson, and Jason James

The motion carried. 7-0

The meeting adjourned at 8:17 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Katrina L. White, MMC
City Clerk/Recorder