



CITY OF MILFORD
CITY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES
February 24, 2025

The City Council of the City of Milford met in the Joseph Ronnie Rogers Council Chambers in Regular Session on Monday, February 24, 2025.

PRESIDING: Mayor F. Todd Culotta
IN ATTENDANCE: Councilmembers Daniel Marabello, Madula Kalesis, Nadia Zychal, Lori Connor, Michael Stewart, Nirmala Samaroo, and Jason James, Sr.
STAFF: City Manager Mark Whitfield, Chief Cecilia Ashe, and City Clerk Katrina White
COUNSEL: Solicitor David Rutt, Esquire

Public Comment Period

Brian Beachaver, 1008 Lemuel Street, Milford, DE 19963, spoke and had concerns about safety in the area of Lulu Ross Elementary School. He would like to see sidewalks put in the area so that the children can walk safely.

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 nine members present. Councilmember Connor was present virtually.

Invocation and Pledge of Allegiance

The invocation was given by Councilmember Wilson followed by The Pledge of Allegiance.

Approval of the Agenda

Councilmember Stewart made the motion to approve the agenda. Councilmember James seconded.

The motion carried unanimously. 8-0

Approval of Previous Minutes

Councilmember Stewart made the motion to approve November 25, 2024, meeting minutes. Councilmember Zychal seconded.

Recognition

There was no recognition.

Public Comments/Final Determination ©

Ordinance 2025-02 ©

Amendment to City of Milford Code

Chapter 174 Property Maintenance/Habitual Offenders

Solicitor Rutt read the Rules of public comments.

Planning Director Rob Pierce reviewed Ordinance 2025-02 which amended Milford City Code Chapter 174 Property Maintenance to include Habitual Offenders. The ordinance was included in the packet.

Councilmember Marabello inquired about who would be responsible for enforcing the violations. Director Pierce responded that Code Enforcement would be responsible for enforcing the ordinance.

The floor was opened for public comment. There were no public comments.

Councilmember James made the motion to adopt Ordinance 2025-02 to amend Chapter 174 Property Maintenance adding language pertaining the habitual offenders and increasing the minimum and maximum property maintenance code violation fine amounts. Councilmember Zychal seconded.

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

The motion carried unanimously. 8-0

Ordinance 2025-03 ©

Amendment to City of Milford Code

Chapter 125 Fiber Optics

Electric Director Tony Chipola reviewed the ordinance 2025-03 that amends Milford City Code Chapter 125 Fiber Optics and removes the existing table of fees.

The floor was opened for public comment. There were no public comments.

Councilmember Samaroo made the motion to adopt Ordinance 2025-03 to amend Chapter 125 Fiber Optics as described. The amendment will streamline the process for managing fiber optic cable leases, and ensure fairness and current pricing to reduce administrative burden on the city staff. Councilmember Wilson seconded.

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

The motion carried unanimously. 8-0

Communications & Correspondence

Councilmember Wilson recognized February as being Black History Month and expressed pride in being a black American and in representing the African American community. She also expressed gratitude for the progress made in which everyone lives and interacts together in the City of Milford.

Councilmember Kalesis reported receiving a call from Mr. Beachaver regarding the sidewalks and visited the area to observe the situation. She suggested that the council also inspect the area and stated that she believes that it warrants attention.

Mayor Culotta thanked Police Chief Ashe and the Milford Police Department for assisting his father after a fall, and acknowledged the assistance provided by Corporal Breckner and Officer Omens.

Unfinished Business

There was no unfinished business.

New Business

Authorization/ DNREC/Mosquito Control Service

City Manager Whitfield reviewed the DNREC Mosquito Control Service Agreement that was included in the packet that permits spraying within the city each year.

Councilmember Marabello made a motion to approve the renewal of the DNREC Mosquito Control Service Agreement for this year. Councilmember Zychal seconded.

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

The motion carried unanimously. 8-0

Adoption/Resolution 2025-02/ Proposal for Bond Issuance and Establishment of Hearing Date

Lou Vitola, Senior Accountant, reviewed Resolution 2025-02 which sets a public hearing date for the project for growth driven water improvements that include a water tower, production wells and water treatment and the referendum process.

Councilmember James made the motion to approve Resolution 2025-02 to initiate the no tax increase, no utility rate increase bond referendum to meet the funding requirements for the water infrastructure improvement plan for the northwest area of the city. Councilmember Wilson seconded.

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

The motion carried unanimously. 8-0

Adoption/Resolution 2025-03/ Solid Waste Refuse Rates

Lou Vitola, Senior Accountant, explained that Utility Financial Solutions, LLC is nationally recognized in the area of rate studies, cost of service studies and other financial and accounting related studies that meet the best practices of publicly owned utilities throughout the country. They do a lot of work on behalf of Appa, which is the American Public Power Association, and the firm has done work for the City of Milford in terms of solid waste rates, water and sewer rates, the electric cost of service study in 2019, the cost of service study in 2019, and the rate refresh that was just did in 2022 or 2023. He also stated that they are also working on water and sewer rate refreshes and the impact fee studies along with electric connection fee studies. He said that they do excellent work.

Dawn Lund, UFS, Utility Financial Solutions, LLC reviewed the presentation that was included in the packet.

Councilmember Marabello made the motion approve Resolution 2025-03 to accept the new rates for the next 5 years as proposed on the schedule that was provided. Councilmember Kalesis seconded.

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

The motion carried unanimously. 8-0

Adjournment

Mayor Culotta asked for a motion to adjourn at 6:36.

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

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

The motion carried unanimously. 8-0

Workshop

Mayor Culotta opened the workshop at 6:42 pm.

Presentation/Elevated LLC/Armory

Lillian Harrison, Elevated Community Development Corporation, reviewed the presentation that was included in the packet and gave an update on their operations highlighting their role as a workforce organization housed within the Milford Armory, which also functions as a separate community service center.

She stated that their mission is to elevate communities by fostering economic self-sufficiency, providing opportunities for individuals to thrive, creating an equitable society, and advocating for social change. They have consistently adhered to this mission since their inception, expanding services across Delaware and into Maryland's Eastern Shore.

She explained that ECDC has significantly grown its team, hiring an Executive Director, two Site Managers, and a Marketing person, with plans for additional staff and interns working in various career paths statewide.

Ms. Harrison noted ECDC's core programs:

Workforce Development: Offers skills training, job placement in diverse sectors (e.g., medical, banking, legal, construction – not just entry-level), and internships that are free to employers and often lead to full-time positions.

Reentry Program: Their flagship program, it focuses on job placement for formerly incarcerated men (with wages ranging from \$15 to \$38/hour), providing counseling, mentoring, and wraparound services. They are looking to deepen services by engaging individual's pre-release and expanding transitional housing.

Community Development: This program involves neighborhood revitalization, including the development of 13 affordable single-family homes in Seaford and 30 studio units in Georgetown, with segments carved out for individuals with disabilities, aging-in-place residents, and displaced veterans. They also provide housing counseling (foreclosure mediation, credit establishment, home purchasing assistance) and are heavily involved in advocacy and policy, holding seats on numerous state and county boards, including the Governor's housing task forces.

She continued to explain that that ECDC has a 96% success rate across its core programs. They have created over 100 jobs, supported entrepreneurs through business advising and access to capital (including a unique credit-building mechanism for incarcerated individuals), and serviced over 200 individuals. Their housing projects alone represent over \$3 million in development.

Historically reliant on private donations, ECDC is actively diversifying its funding sources to ensure long-term sustainability, seeking corporate sponsors and exploring investment opportunities.

ECDC prioritizes professional development, mentoring, and continued education for its growing team in partnering with Delaware Technical and Community College. They aim to significantly increase volunteer engagement in the coming year, becoming more visible and active within the community.

She concluded with the organization is deeply committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion, and the Milford Armory serves as a vibrant community hub hosting various activities, classes, and events.

The Council thanked Ms. Harrison for the good work that she is doing with Elevated CDC in the community.

Pay Study Update/Evergreen Solutions, LLC

City Manager Whitfield stated that the City of Milford is conducting a pay study with Evergreen Solutions to ensure fair pay across all departments and to keep salaries competitive with the market. He explained that Evergreen Solutions LLC is the same firm that did the previous study four years ago and was chosen again for its expertise and cost-effectiveness.

Michael Misrahi, a consultant from Evergreen Solutions LLC gave an update and explained the three phases of the current pay study:

Internal Data Collection: Reviewing the city's current compensation practices.

Employee Data Collection: Surveying employees to update job descriptions and understand their actual duties.

External Market Data Collection: Benchmarking city positions against 38 peer organizations in Delaware and Maryland.

He also provided key points of clarification:

Cost of Living: The study adjusts all data for regional cost of living differences to ensure fair comparisons.

Job Titles vs. Duties: The study focuses on actual job responsibilities, not just titles, to ensure that employees are appropriately classified and compensated. The consultant noted that their work often leads to recommendations for job title changes to better reflect the work being performed.

Evergreen Solutions LLC expects to present draft recommendations to the city within the next 30 days.

Presentation/Customer Service Update

Suzannah Frederick gave the Customer Service update that was included in the packet on pages 100-108.

The customer service and billing department has been busy with staffing changes, new software implementations, and a growing workload due to city expansion.

Staffing & Team Roles: The department recently hired a new cash operations clerk, Stacey Wilkins, who has 20 years of lending experience. Other key team members include Julie Eisenbrey and Vicki Jones, who are billing leads. Julie manages utility rates and third-party vendors, while Vicki was instrumental in the recent Tyler Tax software implementation. Carol Scott focuses on manual deed entry and property updates, and the bilingual staff member, Zuli Ramos-Diaz, is a key asset for communication with a diverse customer base.

Payment & Operations: While there's a push for online payments, 43% of payments are still manually entered. The department also handles a high volume of phone payments, with an average of 400 calls per month. With the new Tyler Tax system and the existing Central Square and Avalon software, the cash operations clerks now work with multiple systems, requiring extensive cross-training.

Technology & Efficiency: The department utilizes a Rave system to send automated calls and emails to customers at risk of disconnection. This has made the process more efficient and reduced the number of actual disconnects. The team also uses a real-time leak report, running it twice a week, to proactively notify customers of potential leaks and prevent costly bills.

Growth & Workload: The city's rapid growth has led to a significant increase in electric and tax accounts, with over 1,300 new electric accounts since 2020. The department's workload is consistently high, handling an estimated 2,000 phone calls a month in addition to other operational tasks.

Future Initiatives: The department is exploring further training opportunities through DMEC and other municipalities to improve customer service skills and conflict management. They are also considering a new document management software and are in discussions to potentially upgrade their utility billing software to a more automated system.

Proposed Deed Restrictions/MCC

Planning Director Rob Pierce reviewed the proposed deed restrictions for the Milford Corporate Center. He explained that the City of Milford is considering new deed restrictions for the Milford Corporate Center that would create a structure similar to a homeowner's association. The goal is to set standards for property use and architectural design to maintain a high-quality, professional appearance for the park

Property Use Restrictions: The proposed restrictions would cover aspects such as nuisances, parking, signage, and maintenance. While some of these already align with city code, others would be new standards.

Architectural Review Committee: The draft calls for an Architectural Review Committee to oversee new projects and building modifications.

Director Pierce posed two main questions to the council:

Level of City Involvement: Should the city's role be short-term, with control eventually turned over to the property owners (similar to a residential HOA), or should the city maintain long-term oversight in perpetuity?

Architectural Standards: Does the council want staff to develop specific architectural design standards for the buildings?

Council members expressed a strong preference for the city to maintain long-term control over the corporate center. They voiced concerns that handing over management to a private association could lead to a decline in standards, as seen in some residential HOAs.

The consensus was that while the city should avoid being overly restrictive and scaring off potential customers, it must maintain a level of oversight to ensure the corporate center remains aesthetically pleasing and a source of pride for the city.

The council agreed that the Planning Commission, which currently serves this function for other business parks, could act as the review body for new projects. However, the ultimate authority and decision-making for these matters should remain with the City Council.

The discussion highlighted a desire to finalize these guidelines in collaboration with Emory Hill, the firm managing the project, and the city solicitor, with the understanding that the first few tenants will set a precedent for future development.

Enterprise Permitting & Licensing Credit Card Fees

Planning Director Pierce reviewed the Enterprise Permitting & Licensing Credit Card Fees presentation that was included in the packet on pages 154-159.

He explained that the city is incurring significant credit card transaction fees, which is especially problematic for payments like the Kent County sewer fee, where the city gets nothing in return. This issue is also anticipated for large utility bill payments.

He explained that the solutions were that the city could either absorb the fees as a cost of doing business or charge a convenience fee to the customer.

Council members generally agreed that the city should not absorb the fees and that they should be passed on to the customer. They emphasized the need for transparency, stating that the fee should be clearly outlined to the customer as an option.

Lou Vitola, Senior Accountant explained the difference between governmental transactions (like permits and taxes), where passing on the fee is standard practice, and utility operations, where absorbing the fee can be a strategic way to mitigate collection risk.

The consensus was to outline the fee and provide customers with a choice between using a credit card and paying the fee or using an alternative payment method.

Adjournment

The workshop concluded at 8:28 pm

Respectfully submitted,

Katrina L. White, MMC
City Clerk/Recorder