



CITY OF MILFORD
CITY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

September 22, 2025

The City Council of the City of Milford met in the Joseph Ronnie Rogers Council Chambers in Regular Session on Monday, September 22, 2025.

PRESIDING: Vice Mayor Jason James, Sr.
IN ATTENDANCE: Councilmembers Daniel Marabello, Madula Kalesis, Nadia Zychal, Michael Stewart, Katrina Wilson and Mayor Todd Culotta
ABSENT: Councilmembers Lori Connor and Danny Perez
STAFF: City Manager Christopher Coleman, Chief Cecilia Ashe, and City Clerk Katrina White
COUNSEL: Solicitor Gregory Morris, Esquire

Public Comment

Solicitor Morris read the rules of public comment.

Julie Morris, 210 East St, Milford, DE 19963, referenced Milford's slogan "Rivertown, Art Town, Hometown" and feels that the slogan no longer fits reality due to explosive growth and the addition of thousands of new housing units.

She suggested a more fitting slogan would be "Developer City" or "Struggling to Catch Up City" because planning decisions have consistently prioritized rapid residential construction over essential infrastructure (roads, emergency services, water systems, and schools).

Ms. Morris called for the city to acknowledge that it is at a "crossroad" and to commit to responsible, thoughtful planning that supports the official slogan. She urged the Council to place a frank discussion about growth and infrastructure on a future agenda and to re-examine the slogan so that the city's words and planning reflect its current reality.

Rob Schuler 18511 Thelma Lane, Milford, DE 19963, stated that he is not against development or capitalism. He believes he, as a resident, should not be forced to cover the infrastructure costs for large, billion-dollar companies or D.R. Horton so they can make a profit and that the burden of infrastructure costs should be placed directly on the developers.

Gary Wexler, 290 Stockley Road, Milton, DE 19968, asked if the meeting was about developments in general in Sussex County. Solicitor Morris advised him that the meeting was the City of Milford Council meeting and not a Sussex County Council meeting.

Call to Order - Vice Mayor Jason James

Vice Mayor James called the meeting to order at 6:06 pm.

Roll Call

Roll Call showed that there were 6 members present. Councilmembers Lori Connor, Danny Perez, and Mayor Culotta were not present.

Invocation and Pledge of Allegiance

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

Approval of the Agenda

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

Yes Daniel Marabello, Madula Kalesis, Nadia Zychal, Michael Stewart, Katrina Wilson, and Jason James

The motion carried. 6-0

Approval of Previous Minutes

Councilmember Kalesis made the motion to approve September 8, 2025 minutes. Councilmember Zychal seconded.

Yes Daniel Marabello, Madula Kalesis, Nadia Zychal, Michael Stewart, Katrina Wilson, and Jason James

The motion carried. 6-0

[2025 09 08 Council Minutes](#)

Recognition

Proclamation 2025-15 Suicide Prevention Awareness Month

Councilmember Marabello read Proclamation 2025-15 Suicide Prevention Awareness Month.

[2025 15 Suicide Prevention Awareness Month Sept 2025](#)

Proclamation 2025-16 National Customer Service Week

Councilmember Zychal read Proclamation 2025-16 National Customer Service Week.

[2025 16 National Customer Service Week Oct 6-10](#)

Proclamation 2025-17 Public Power Week

City Manager Chris Coleman read Proclamation 2025-17 Public Power Week

[2025 17 Public Power Week 10-5 to 11, 2025](#)

Proclamation 2025-18 Cybersecurity Awareness Month

Councilmember Wilson read Proclamation 2025-18 Cybersecurity Awareness Month.

[2025 18 Cybersecurity Awareness Month - Oct 2025](#)

Public Hearings/Comments/Final Determination

Solicitor Morris read the rules of public hearings.

Ordinance 2025-16 Cypress Hall/Planned Unit Development

Planning Director Pierce reviewed the staff report and analysis that was included in the packet.

Tim Metzner, Davis Bowen & Friedel, 1 Park Avenue, Milford, DE 19963, represented Shawnee Farms, LLC and explained the project. The primary reason for the revision was to add a pump station. He explained that during the design phase, it was determined that a new sewer pump station was necessary for the site. The station would be constructed to city standards, turned over to the city and designed to allow for future sewer expansion to farms west of the development. Another reason was phasing changes. The original PUD was approved with three phases. The project is now being broken into smaller sub-phases (3, 4, and 5) primarily due to the need for the new sewer infrastructure, which will be constructed in the final phase. Also, for the reason of lot and road changes due to one lot was added where an original road connection (to Lexis Drive) was removed.

He further explained that the core design elements—the entrance road onto Route 113, water, sewer, and stormwater infrastructure—were all built and accounted for during the initial design phase to handle the full build-out of the PUD. The waivers requested are mostly to maintain consistency with the road widths, right-of-way widths, and parking reductions that were already approved and built in Phase 1 (the townhomes).

Planning Director Pierce confirmed that the design elements related to road widths and right-of-way were consistent with the original PUD, which met the code at the time. The three substantive changes requiring approval are the addition of the lift station, the removal of the interconnector road, and the addition of one single-family home.

Kim Wills, 2 Sunset Lane, Milford, DE 19963 spoke in opposition to approving the current phase of the development project using prior, outdated building codes. She suggested that the Council seek official recommendations from both the School Board and the Fire Department regarding the project's suitability before granting approval, noting that no such letters or input have been provided yet.

Trish Marvel, 6525 Shawnee Rd, Milford, DE 19963, expressed concern about the traffic impact of the proposed development, which she estimated could add up to 1,000 cars. She explained that Shawnee Road already experiences substantial traffic, speeding, and ignored stop signs. The new development will worsen this. She had concerns about the traffic patterns for people entering and exiting the development and wondered if residents might use the Redner's parking lot as a shortcut. She urged the Council to thoroughly examine the waivers being requested, stated that the project should adhere to current building requirements for road and sidewalk sizes, especially since the original plan dates back 20 years. She concluded by asking the Council not to approve or decline the project immediately, but to request more detail and ensure all questions are answered before making a decision.

Mayor Culotta joined the meeting at 6:55 pm.

Julie Morris, 210 East St, Milford, DE 19963, spoke in opposition to the project and expressed several concerns. She stated that she had the opportunity to tour the existing homes and found them not to be ADA-friendly, specifically, the bathrooms were too narrow for maneuverability. She explained that the PUD is requesting nearly a dozen waivers from current city standards to achieve high density and believes that waivers, like reducing pavement thickness, ultimately burden the city, which will incur future costs to maintain and repair roads damaged by trash trucks and snow removal equipment.

She spoke in opposition to the waiver that narrows the main collector road from 38 feet to 28 feet citing it as narrower than the Truitt Avenue proposal and raised concerns from the Fire Department about emergency access and the ability for large vehicles (like fire trucks) to maneuver. She also noted the waiver relaxing shade tree requirements stating that it works against the 2021 Delaware Climate Action Plan by making the neighborhood hotter.

She then stated that city staff and leaders of the Carlisle Fire Company fear retaliation and hesitate to speak up about safety concerns related to the development. She mentioned previous officials who had spoken against the project and noted that their calls to the Fire Department were met with reluctance to comment publicly. She concluded with Milford currently sends all emergency calls between 11:00 PM and 7:00 AM to nearby towns (Houston, Frederica, and Ellendale) due to staffing issues, stating that the city cannot responsibly approve more housing given this existing crisis.

There was a lengthy discussion by council about why the project is not required to meet current 2025 street standards, as the codes have changed since the 2022 approval. Council generally agreed that they are "locked into" the 2022 PUD conditions, and it was explained that the current vote only addresses minor additions (like a pump station and one extra lot). It was also clarified that the project's R-3 zoning actually allows for a significantly higher density, up to 828 units, meaning the 549 proposed units are not the maximum possible.

Councilmember Kalesis expressed concern over the lack of direct dialogue with the School District and a possible police staffing crisis late at night.

Councilmember Wilson made a comment for the public record to clarify the process for development approvals. She explained that the city's guidelines require all applications, whether residential or commercial, to be sent to numerous partnering agencies and department heads for review. These agencies include: DELDOT (Delaware Department of Transportation), State Planning Agency, Health and Social Service Division, Department of Natural Resources, Sussex Conservation District, The State Fire Marshal's Office and the local Fire Department, Public Works and Parks and Recreation, Milford Police Department and the Milford School District. She stated that these agencies have the opportunity to submit comments, questions, or objections, which are then included in the council's packet. This process ensures that all external concerns are addressed and that the city attempts to operate within the established guidelines.

Planning Director Pierce confirmed that it is correct and stated that every application, whether it's a residential development or a commercial site plan, goes out to all of the partnering agencies and department heads, and any comments received back are put in the packet.

Police Chief Ashe responded that the department is actively hiring three new officers (approved by Council) this year and is proactively managing projected growth.

Planning Director Rob Pierce noted that while the requested 28-foot road width is narrower than current code, it still meets the State Fire Code minimum requirement of 20 feet.

Councilmember Wilson made a motion to approve Ordinance 2025-16 Revised PUD, Planned Unit Development. Councilmember Zychal seconded.

Councilmember Marabello voted yes for the reasons that they're restricted to what they can do and cannot do. It's already set in stone and they don't have much of a choice.

Councilmember Kalesis voted no for the reason that she believes that the PUD does need to be updated so it is with the current code.

Councilmember Zychal voted yes for the reasons that she did have concerns, along with Councilmember Kalesis's consideration of the code but had concerns considering completing this project in a consistent manner and also in accommodating affordable and mixed-usage housing. It is a need and with the input of staff and other agencies feels that this is going to move at a pace in an orderly fashion.

Councilmember Stewart voted no for the reasons that he sees the existing PUD that is already in place and does not agree with some of the variances that were already given in the previous one but is unable to do anything about that. So going forward they can use the existing PUD that is already in place.

Councilmember Wilson voted yes for the reasons of what they are asking for, the new pump station or the new pond. She thinks it is smart to do that and it is very responsible of them to prepare for the future, future tie-ins and future growth to those surrounding areas. She would also like to see this project completed in her lifetime. It's been on the books a long time and thinks it's good for the City of Milford to have the next level of growth for some of the residents and first-time homebuyers.

Vice Mayor James voted yes for the reasons that he believes that the developer has acted in good faith, with this project, and the homes that are being built will help satisfy the great need for housing stock in the Milford area.

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

No Madula Kalesis and Michael Stewart

The motion carried. 4-2

[Cypress Hall - PUD - Packet](#) 

[Cypress Hall - Public Comment #1 - 090525](#) 

Ordinance 2025-15 Cypress Hall/Phase III/Preliminary Major Subdivision

Planning Director Pierce reviewed the staff report and analysis that was included in the packet.

Councilmember Marabell0 sought clarification on the number of units in Phase 3 of the development. Planning Director Pierce clarified that the original project was revised into smaller phases for the developer. Phase 3, which is the immediate focus, contains 16 duplex lots (16 units). The previously approved 119 single-family detached and 46 semi-detached homes are now distributed across the new Phases 3, 4, and 5. Phase 5, the final phase, includes the area for the new sewer lift station. No new waivers are being requested for Phase 3; it is consistent with the waivers already approved in the overall PUD. The parking requirement for these units is compliant with the code, as the 2.5 spaces-per-unit rule only applies to apartment units, not duplexes. The street width in front of these units is also consistent with the previously approved PUD (around 36 to 38 feet). He also added that it's actually 40 feet of pavement in front of the duplexes.

Tim Metzner, Davis Bowen & Friedel, 1 Park Avenue, Milford, DE 19963, represented Shawnee Farms LLC, requested preliminary major subdivision approval for Phase 3 only of the Cypress Hall development. He explained that Phase 3 is straightforward, comprising 16 duplex units that will front onto the previously constructed Kirsten Drive. They chose to proceed with this smaller phase to expedite construction, as all necessary infrastructure (sewer cleanouts, water meters, and stormwater systems) had already been planned and installed to serve these specific 16 lots. Once this preliminary approval is granted and agency

sign-offs are secured, the owner would be able to immediately begin pulling building permits for the duplexes.

Julie Morris, 210 East St, Milford, DE 19963, spoke in opposition to approving Preliminary Major Subdivision for Phase 3, stating that it is not an isolated step but a "gateway" to finishing the entire 549-unit development. She pointed out that the original Phase 3 preliminary approval from March 2022 has expired, suggesting the project hasn't met its commitments and must restart. She stated that the city's current infrastructure is failing, citing instances where sewer overflows into the Murderkill River during heavy rain, leading to fines. She again stated that the Carlisle Fire Department sends emergency calls to three surrounding towns between 11 PM and 7 AM due to staffing shortages which is a critical public safety issue. She also stated that the Milford High School is over capacity by 250 children, and that an entire floor of the Middle School is unusable because the district lacks teachers to staff the classrooms, with many current classrooms exceeding the 22-student cap. She also expressed concerns about the continuous use of waivers, specifically the one reducing the collector road width from 38 feet to 28 feet, citing previous concerns from former Public Works and Fire Department officials about safety and emergency access.

There were no additional public comments and Vice Mayor James closed the Public Hearing at 7:43 pm.

Councilman Marabella sought clarity on the specifics of the lots and infrastructure for Phase 3.

Director Pierce stated in regard to basements, parking and road widths that he could not confirm whether the units would have basements, as they are only approving the type of unit and lot structure, not the home construction. However, all non-apartment units are compliant with the minimum off-street parking requirements (likely two spots per unit).

The most significant finding was that the new phases will adhere to the lower standard of the old PUD approval, not the current city code. Both Planning Director Pierce and City Solicitor Morris confirmed that because the overall PUD was approved with certain waivers (like the narrower road pavement width), those waivers carry through to Phase 3 and all subsequent phases. Planning Director Pierce further clarified that even if the Council were to deny the current revised PUD motion, the developer would still be operating under the original 2022 PUD. This prior approval already allows them to construct the collector roads at the smaller 28-foot pavement width.

Councilmember Wilson made the motion to approve Ordinance 2025-15 Preliminary Major Subdivision. Councilmember James seconded.

Councilmember Stewart voted no for the reason that he is not in favor of the project and felt like his hands were tied.

Councilmember Wilson voted yes for the reason that council had already approved the revised PUD and understands that it makes sense how they are breaking it down into phases to make it more doable. It makes sense for getting to the completion date of this project.

Councilmember Zychal voted yes for the same reasons as stated by Councilmember Wilson.

Councilmember Kalesis voted no for the reasons previously stated.

Councilmember Marabello voted no for the reasons that he stated previously and is not sure they cannot improve it on their own, make the roads wider, even though it was approved before. He thinks council

should go with the new guidelines. It doesn't have to be consistent with the old part that's finished already.

Councilmember James voted yes for the reason that Phase 3, as the City Planner said, does conform to the standard 2.5 parking, and all the other comments made that it is in conformity.

Due to the vote resulting in a 3-Yes and 3-No tie, Mayor Culotta was required to cast the deciding vote to break the tie.

Mayor Culotta voted yes for the reason that he thinks that this is important to the growth and affordable housing in Milford.

Yes Nadia Zychal, Katrina Wilson, Jason James and Mayor Culotta

No Daniel Marabello, Madula Kalesis and Michael Stewart

The motion carried. 4-3

[Cypress Hall - Phase III - Packet](#) 

[Cypress Hall - Public Comment #1 - 090525](#) 

Communications & Correspondence

Councilmember Marabello announced the passing of long-time resident Mr. Douglas Gibson who was approaching the age of 103 years old. Councilmember Wilson announced that the service for him would be on September 30, 2025 at 10:00 am at Mount Zion AME Church in Ellendale, DE.

Councilmember Zychal announced that tonight, as of sunset, is the year 5786 on the Rosh Hashanah calendar and wanted to wish everybody that celebrated, Alashana Tova.

Councilmember Kalesis reported that she received a complaint about Carlisle Lane and wanted to bring it to Council's attention. She explained that cars are parked on both sides of the street, sometimes with buses coming and going both ways and it is tight on the street. The person reporting the complaint said that her car keeps getting hit. Councilmember Kalesis suggested possibly making the street a one-way street.

Councilmember Wilson stated that it was brought to her attention that on Jefferson Street shrubs and bushes are protruding out, creating a safety hazard. She also wanted to recognize Howard Willis from Code Enforcement for assisting families at Silver Lake Estates who have been dealing with mold issues that resulted in hospitalizations.

Mayor Culotta announced the monthly dinner meeting Delaware League of Local Government (DLLG) on September 25, 2025, at the Modern Maturity Center in Dover, DE.

City Manager Chris Coleman read a letter from resident Brian Donovan who submitted a commendation regarding the excellent customer service he received from city employee Nikki Mumaw. Nikki proactively contacted the Donovans on September 11th after noticing their water account showed high hourly usage, suggesting a potential leak. This call prompted them to quickly address a leaking toilet tank, which they

had known about but underestimated. Mr. Donovan praised Nikki for her initiative, stating her action deserved recognition.

Councilmember James thanked the Milford Chamber for the great Riverwalk Freedom Festival along with everyone who contributed to the planning and execution of the event. He also extended thanks to the city manager and police chief on behalf of the trustees of Bethel AME Church for meeting with them on concerns that they have.

Mayor Culotta also thanked the Milford Chamber for the Riverwalk Freedom Festival.

Councilmember Stewart reported that he had been contacted in reference to the military flags around town and asked who should be contacted to get more information. Mayor Culotta answered that Downtown Milford Inc (DMI) could be contacted or Joey Phillips would be able to help to obtain flags.

Monthly Finance Report

Senior Accountant Vitola reviewed the monthly finance report tht was include in the packet.

Councilmember Zychal made the motion to approve the July Monthly Finance Report. Councilmember Wilson seconded.

Yes Daniel Marabello, Madula Kalesis, Nadia Zychal, Michael Stewart, Katrina Wilson, and Jason James

The motion carried. 6-0

Finance Report - Jul 2025

Unfinished Business

There was no unfinished business.

New Business

Adoption/Resolution 2025-14/Halloween Trick or Treat Observance

Mayor Culotta read Resolution 2025-14 Halloween Trick or Treat Observance scheduled for Friday, October 31, 2025.

There were no public comments in reference to Resolution 2025-14.

Councilmember Marabello made the motion to approve Resolution 2025-14. Councilmember Wilson seconded.

Yes Daniel Marabello, Madula Kalesis, Nadia Zychal, Michael Stewart, Katrina Wilson, and Jason James

The motion carried. 6-0

Resolution 2025 14 Trick or Treat Observance

Adjournment

Vice Mayor James asked for a motion to adjourn.

Councilmember Kalesis made a motion to adjourn. Councilmember Marabello seconded.

Yes Daniel Marabello, Madula Kalesis, Nadia Zychal, Michael Stewart, Katrina Wilson, and Jason James

The motion carried. 6-0

The meeting adjourned at 8:10 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Katrina L. White, MMC
City Clerk/Recorder