

REGULAR MEETING
MAYOR AND COUNCIL
MARCH 16, 2026

Mayor Chegwidden to 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 - Excused
Councilwoman Wickenheisser - Present
Councilman Yeager – Present

Also in attendance were CFO Jason Gabloff, Borough Clerk Cheryl Muzzillo, Attorney Roman Hirniak and Town Planner, Jessica Caldwell.

Flag Salute

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

Open to the Public

Mayor Chegwidden opened the meeting to the public.

Mark Baldwin, 39 Columbia St.: He expressed frustration over the cancellation of the Columbia Street Park project and noted that despite a 2025 guarantee from that the project would proceed in 2026, he believes it was scrapped in favor of other capital projects. While acknowledging the park was built on a swamp, he believes the flooding and drainage issues could be mitigated through proper grading and drainage repairs, strategic landscaping, and installing trees and plants to manage water.

Gary Cole, 66 Robert St.: He discussed his termination from the Recycling Center for insubordination, a charge he disputed. He expressed his belief that Mr. Hutchins and Mr. Quillinan were against his hiring from the start.

Matthew Dunn, 42 E. Sterling St: He shared that he was disheartened by the cancellation of the Columbia Street Park project and urged for improvements to address its deteriorating state.

Gustavo Molina, 43 Columbia St.: He echoed concerns regarding the poor condition of the park and requested improvements.

Barbara Tarchak, 26117 Westview: She inquired as to when the public's questions would be answered. She was informed that responses would be provided after the public portion of the meeting was closed.

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

Ordinance

Councilwoman Hobbs presented O-04-26, "An Ordinance of the Borough of Wharton, County of Morris, State of New Jersey Repealing Article 16 "Fair Share Ordinance" and Repealing and Replacing Chapter 64 "Affordable Housing" of the Code of the Borough of Wharton to Address the Requirements of the Fair Housing Act and to Comply with the Borough's Round Four Affordable Housing Obligations," on second reading by title only.

Mayor Chegwidden opened the meeting to the public for questions or comments on this Ordinance only.

Ms. Jessica Caldwell, Town Planner: She explained that the ordinance is primarily administrative, replacing existing rules to comply with new State mandates regarding "Round Four" affordable housing obligations. The updated rules govern unit

requirements (such as bedroom counts), marketing strategies, income requirements, and the funding mechanisms for these programs.

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

A motion was made by Councilwoman Hobbs and seconded by Councilman Yeager to adopt O-04-26 on second and final reading.

ROLL CALL VOTE: YEA: 5 NAY: 0 ABSENT: 1 ABSTAIN: 0
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Ordinance

Council President Binkoski introduced O-5-26, “An Ordinance to Exceed the Municipal Budget Appropriation Limits and to Establish a CAP Bank (N.J.S.A. 40A:4-45.14),” on first reading, by title only.

A motion was made by Council President Binkoski and seconded by Councilwoman Wickenheisser to adopt O-5-26 on first reading.

Councilwoman Gonzalez: Requested to make a statement before her vote and emphasized that this ordinance is intended for the following year's budget.

In response, CFO Jason Gabloff explained that the CAP rate functions as an insurance policy rather than actual money. It is established so that if a CAP issue arises next year, funds would be available to appropriate. To illustrate the necessity of the ordinance, significant increases in insurance costs were cited as an example of why a CAP Bank is put in place. He confirmed that the current 2026 budget remains within the 2% CAP.

The Mayor mentioned that the School Board also implements a CAP annually, though Councilwoman Hobbs expressed uncertainty, noting her belief that the school consistently stays within the 2% limit.

ROLL CALL VOTE: YEA: 5 NAY: 0 ABSENT: 1 ABSTAIN: 0
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Mayor Chegwidden set the date of April 6, 2026 for second and final reading.

2026 Municipal Budget

Council President Binkoski introduced R-63-26 – the 2026 Municipal Budget.

A motion was made by Council President Binkoski and seconded by Councilwoman Wickenheisser to adopt the introduction of the 2026 Municipal Budget.

ROLL CALL VOTE: YEA: 5 NAY: 0 ABSENT: 1 ABSTAIN: 0
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Mayor Chegwidden set the meeting of April 20, 2026 for the public hearing on the 2026 Municipal Budget.

2026 Special District Budget

Councilwoman Wickenheisser introduced R-64-26 – the 2026 Special District Budget.

A motion was made by Councilwoman Wickenheisser and seconded by Council President Binkoski to adopt the introduction of the 2026 Special District Budget.

ROLL CALL VOTE: YEA: 5 NAY: 0 ABSENT: 1 ABSTAIN: 0
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Mayor Chegwidden set the meeting of April 20, 2026 for the public hearing on the 2026 Special District Budget.

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: 2/23/26

R-65-26: Authorize Agreement D&M Fireworks
R-66-26: Adopting Fourth Round Affordable Housing Spending Plan
R-67-26: Adopting Affordable Housing Affirmative Marketing Plan
R-68-26: Adopting Rehabilitation Program Operating Manual
R-69-26: Tax Sale Redemption TSC 2023-004 Christiana
R-70-26: Appointing Administrative Agent of Affordable Housing
R-71-26: Authorizing Appointment of Special Labor Counsel
R-72-26: Authorizing Refund of Tax Appeal Judgement
R-73-26: Retaining Special Counsel for Eminent Domain Matters
R-74-26: Authorizing Preliminary Studies and Negotiations
R-75-26: Renewing Membership in the Morris County Municipal Joint Insurance Fund
R-76-26: Award Bid Pine Street Parking Lot Improvements

Approve Recreation Facility Application: WALL
Approve Recreation Facility Application: Jersey Warhawks (WALL Majors Team)

A motion was made by Council President Binkoski and seconded by Councilwoman Wickenheisser to approve all items listed on the Consent Agenda.

ROLL CALL VOTE: YEA: 5 NAY: 0 ABSENT: 1 ABSTAIN: 0

Correspondence

- Morris County Planning Board Minutes
- Rockaway Township Notice of Proposed Land Use Ordinances Introductions
- Superintendent’s Letter re: Proposed Borough Grant for Student Achievement

Council Reports

Council President Binkoski: He attended a budget meeting with the Finance Committee and a meeting with Mr. Hutchins to review project timetables. He thanked Mr. Gabloff for his efforts in putting the budget together. He also met with the Town Planner and the Dover Group regarding their plans for the Joe Cubert Mansion project. He had a call with Superintendent Sanchez and discussed the grant program plan. Dr. Sanchez will provide details so it can be finalized. Community engagements included attending St. Patrick's Day celebrations at the Sheriff's event and the American Legion.

Councilwoman Gonzalez: She expressed gratitude to Council President Binkoski and Mr. Hutchins for the clarification of questions she had raised earlier in the meeting.

Councilwoman Hobbs: She expressed gratitude to the Mayor and Council President for the clarification of her earlier questions. She provided an extensive report on the Wharton School District, noting that while English Language Arts (ELA) scores are still recovering from COVID-19 impacts, math scores have recovered and 8th-grade scores have exceeded pre-pandemic levels. She noted that while the population has remained relatively stable at MacKinnon and decreased at Duffy, the number of multilanguage learners has risen significantly at both schools. She reported that math proficiency and growth targets were met across all subgroups in the 2023-2024 school reports.

She attended a BOE meeting and noted that the meetings are now held in the APR instead of the Library. She also attended a Planning Board training and the RVRSA Special Meeting. She indicated she had met with the attorney to discuss the Jersey City situation.

Additionally, she proposed an emergency line or "buddy system" for vulnerable residents during severe weather. She also proposed a resolution supporting Roxbury Township’s opposition to a proposed ICE facility.

Mayor Chegwidden clarified that an emergency system is already in place through the Police Department and noted that a volunteer-based door-to-door system would present background check challenges.

Councilwoman Wickenheisser: She commended Mr. Gabloff and the Finance Committee's work. She addressed resident concerns regarding the Board of Education meeting being rescheduled for the same night as the Mayor and Council meeting. She spoke with one of the Board of Education members and while it is understood "why" the meeting had to be rescheduled, she was not given a clear answer as to why it had to be held on the same day as the Mayor and Council meeting.

Councilman Yeager: He noted that the Fire Department responded to 15 calls last month and recognized the work of the Police Department and the budget team.

Mayor Chegwidden's Report: During his report, Mayor Chegwidden highlighted several administrative updates and community activities:

- The Mayor met with Dave and CFO Jason Gabloff to discuss the budget. He expressed appreciation for Mr. Gabloff's role in helping the town remain debt-free.
- He attended the Wharton FOP IrishFest and commended them on a job well done.
- Alongside Council members Ana Gonzalez and Nicole Wickenheisser, the Mayor participated in the "Leap in the Lake" event to raise money for children with special needs.
- The Mayor, Mr. Hutchins, and Mr. Quillinan held a follow-up meeting with Picatinny Arsenal to explore potential opportunities for shared services.

Open to the Public

Mayor Chegwidden opened the meeting to the public.

Jim Gottshall, 44 Third St.: He requested a commitment from the community and Council to end personal attacks during the election cycle. He expressed his being disturbed by a social media post mocking a former Councilwoman's English proficiency.

Mr. Baldwin, 39 Columbia St.: He characterized the Council President's earlier statement regarding the park's cancellation as an "untruth" and an attack. He acknowledged the post about the former Councilwoman was "horrible" but asserted that "attacks go both ways". He then asked when the questions from his earlier statement would be addressed. Mayor Chegwidden repeated his statement made to Ms. Tarchak from earlier in the meeting that he would address the issues when the meeting was closed to the public.

Mr. Gottshall, 44 Third St.: He responded to Mr. Baldwin's confrontational statements by indicating he could have saved a lot of time and energy if he had simply asked when the Mayor would address his questions instead of leading with assumptions. He noted for the record that the disparaging social media comments about the former Councilwoman's English had been "liked" by Mr. Baldwin and Councilwoman Hobbs. He stated the post was screenshotted and verified.

Mayor Chegwidden intervened during the exchange between Mr. Gottshall and Mr. Baldwin, stating the meeting was not the appropriate venue for that conversation and directed the meeting to return to official business.

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

Mayor Chegwidden and Mr. Hutchins addressed concerns regarding the status of the Columbia Street Park and the prioritization of town projects:

- **Status of Columbia Street Park:** The Mayor clarified that the project has not been cancelled but is currently delayed ("moving") pending the receipt of a \$4M federal grant. He stated it would be fiscally irresponsible to spend local taxpayer funds on the project when federal funding is a strong possibility. He confirmed that the administration is committed to implementing "little improvements" in the interim to address immediate maintenance needs.

- **Grant Funding Details:** Mr. Hutchins explained that the town was solicited by Senator Booker’s office to apply for a federal community involvement grant. While the town has been urged to re-apply due to the strength of the project, the funds are currently tied to the passage of the federal budget.
- **Prioritization of Other Projects:**
 - **Orchard Mine Park:** The project has been in development for 3+ years and is funded by a County Open Space Grant that must be used within a strict timeframe or the funds will be lost.
 - **Pine Street Property:** This project has been in development for five years to address critical safety and parking issues on Main Street. Prioritized as a safety issue to reduce congestion on Main Street and allow for parking on only one side of the street.
- **Engineering and Safety:** The Mayor noted that Columbia Street Park is built on a "swamp" area where previous structures have sunk. He emphasized that the project must be properly engineered to ensure long-term safety, rather than rushing with temporary fixes.
- **Fiscal Philosophy:** The Mayor emphasized a "pay-as-you-go" philosophy to avoid leaving future administrations with debt:
 - **No Debt Policy:** The administration refuses to go into debt for the park; they will only proceed once the money is secured.
 - **Precedent:** This cautious approach has been applied to other essentials, such as delaying the purchase of fire trucks until funds were available.
- **Commitment to Maintenance:** The Mayor confirmed that "little improvements" (maintenance) will be completed in the interim to address immediate concerns and prevent injury.
- **Administrative Priorities:** He pointed out that the town remains responsive to resident requests, citing recent changes to the road paving schedule made based specifically on Mr. Baldwin’s requests illustrating that the council is balancing multiple community needs.
- **Non-Partisan Governance:** The Mayor concluded by stating that municipal services—like road paving and water—are non-partisan responsibilities of local government rather than partisan politics, and the council’s duty is to balance all resident needs simultaneously. He urged the community to move past bickering to focus on the town's best interests.
- **Key Takeaway:** The administration views the park delay as a strategic financial move to secure \$4M in federal funding, while moving forward on other projects like Orchard Mine Park and the Pine Street Parking Lot that are funded by non-transferable county grants.

Adjournment

A motion was made by Council President Binkoski to adjourn and was seconded by Councilwoman Jones. This motion was approved via voice vote.

March 16, 2026

BOROUGH OF WHARTON

ATTEST:

WILLIAM J. CHEGWIDDEN,
MAYOR

Cheryl Muzzillo,
Borough Clerk