

Council of the City of York, Pennsylvania

Edquina Washington, President of Council
Betsy Buckingham, Vice President of Council
Dr. Felicia O. A. Dennis, Member of Council
Elizabeth Bupp, Member of Council
Teresa Johnescu, Member of Council

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MINUTES December 16, 2025 6:00 p.m.

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CALL TO ORDER: President Washington called the December 16, 2025, meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. in Council Chambers, 101 S. George St., York, PA, with the following members present: Elizabeth Bupp, Teresa Johescu, Felicia Dennis, Betsy Buckingham, Vice President, and Edquina Washington, President with President Washington presiding.

Members of the Administration included: Michael Helfrich, Mayor; Kim Robertson, Business Administrator; Blanda Nace, Redevelopment Authority; and Assistant Solicitor Gedde Schweikert; Gerry, Dan, Daneen, Monica.

Council Staff in attendance included: Dianna L. Thompson, City Clerk.

I. Public Comment:

Marilyn Hake (Resident & Treasurer, Marketway Towers), detailed the difficulties her condominium association faced while attempting to opt out of city refuse services to contract with Penn Waste for better service and lower rates. She described a confusing experience at City Hall where staff at the tax windows were unable to direct her to the correct office. Hake strongly contested the \$45 per unit quarterly opt-out fee (totaling \$945 per quarter), noting that the city claimed this covered yard waste, snow removal, and street cleaning. She argued that the condos have no yards to produce waste and that snow removal is already funded through property taxes.

Don Hake (Resident) reported that a vehicle required towing at a city garage, but the company (AAA) could not enter due to low hanging signs. He eventually found a company from West York with a lower vehicle and requested that Council look into raising the signs, which are held by chains. Secondly, Hake clarified that he never asked for property inspections to be halted, despite Council's impression from a prior meeting. He argued that the city definitely needs to inspect properties, citing a house with a tree growing out from under the porch and questioning whether multi-mailbox single-family homes were used to hide rental status. He asked why property inspections and ratings are "secretive" and why residents lack access to the ratings. He stated that "secrecy is the mother of corruption" and asked for the status of discussions regarding the conflict between city processes and a 22-page Pennsylvania Supreme Court ruling he had previously shared. Finally, he questioned the 5-minute rule for public comment, stating it was established by a past official because she found dialogue "hard to stay awake" for.

Dominick Pepper (Resident) discussed the Pennsylvania American Water rate increases. He noted an increase in May 2024 and a new notice in November announcing another petition for an increase on January 13th. He stated that for a five-person household using a conservative 6,500 to 7,000 gallons, the monthly bill would rise to \$230. He criticized the affordability rhetoric in media, noting that while gas and groceries are down, his monthly bills and property taxes are rising. He characterized the two increases in eight months as ridiculous and stated, "we're not an ATM". He requested that the city petition the PUC for help and asked for a response via email. (UPDATE: Councilwoman Johnescu responded to Mr. Pepper by email on December 18 directing him to Rep. Carol Hill-Evans' Facebook page where it explains the rate increase was halted while the PUC investigates, which Mr. Pepper confirmed receipt.)

There being no further discussion, public comment adjourned at 6:16 p.m.

- II. Called Legislative Meeting to Order at 6:16 p.m.
- III. Roll Call
- IV. Pledge of Allegiance was recited.
- V. Moment of Silence was observed.
- VI. Action on previous meeting Minutes of [December 2, 2025](#) (legislative). Council dispensed with the reading of the minutes and unanimously approved as written.
- VII. Presentations, Awards and Announcements

Councilwoman Elizabeth Bupp presented the Council members and the City Clerk with commemorative plaques to recognize them as the first all-women Council in the history of the city. She noted the plaques were produced by MSG Inc., a local business. President Washington and other members thanked Councilwoman Bupp and expressed that it was an honor to serve.

VIII. Meeting(s) Scheduled:

► **Legislative Meeting:** The Reorganization meeting of Council will be held on Monday, January 5, 2026 at 6:00 p.m. in Council Chambers. Agenda items are due by 12 noon on December 29th.

► **Council Committee Meeting:** Scheduled for Wednesday, January 28, 2026 at 6:00 p.m. in Council Chambers. Agenda items are due by 12 noon on January 21st.

- IX. Status of Prior Committee Referrals: No reports.
- X. Legislative Agenda: (Order of Business - Action on Subdivision/Land Development & HARB Resolutions; Final Passage of Bills/Resolutions; New Business)

Subdivision/Land Development/HARB:

- 1. Resolution No. 90 - A Resolution
Accepting the recommendations of HARB. ([View](#))
Introduced by: Teresa Johnecu
Originator: HARB

Resolution No. 90, Session 2025, A Resolution accepting the recommendations of HARB in issuing certificates of appropriateness for work to be done at 413, 417, 423 W. Market St.; 9 E. Philadelphia St. (15 E. Philadelphia St.); 252 E. Princess St.; and 138 E. Market St., was introduced by Johnescu, read at length, and on motion of Johnescu, seconded by Washington, Resolution

No. 90 came up for discussion.

Councilwoman Bupp highlighted that while no formal action was taken regarding the Union Lutheran Church, the preliminary review and public comments were documented in the HARB minutes and incorporated into the record for informational purposes.

There being no further discussion, Resolution No. 90 PASSED by the following vote: Yeas - Bupp, Johnescu, Dennis, Buckingham, Washington - 5; Nays - 0.

2. Resolution No. 91 - A Resolution Authorizing various subdivision/land development waivers. ([View](#)) (Submitted by RGS Associates on behalf of the York City Redevelopment Authority for the Hope & Green St. project)
Introduced by: Edquina Washington
Originator: Economic & Community Development (Planning)

Resolution No. 91, Session 2025, A Resolution authorizing various subdivision/land development waivers submitted by RGS Associates on behalf of the York City Redevelopment Authority for the Hope & Green Street Project, was introduced by Washington, read at length, and on motion of Washington, seconded by Johnescu, Resolution No. 91 came up for discussion.

Blanda Nace, identifying himself as the Secretary of the Redevelopment Authority, explained that the RDA was presenting a straightforward land development subdivision plan for the parcel located at Hope and Green Streets, formerly known as the Hope Garden. He stated that the purpose of the plan was to subdivide the existing 14 long, narrow lots into 20 newly configured lots that would be more functional, better defined, and equipped with stormwater management infrastructure. Nace emphasized that this action was preparatory in nature and intended to position the land for future development, rather than to approve any specific construction project at this time.

Todd Kurl, RGS Associates, addressed Council to elaborate on the technical aspects of the subdivision and the waivers requested. Kurl acknowledged that staff had not supported four of the five waivers but clarified that the Planning Commission had recommended approval. He then described each waiver in detail. The first waiver, which staff supported, pertained to the preliminary plan requirement. The second waiver involved relief from the street right-of-way and cartway width standards. Kurl explained that the surrounding streets functioned essentially as alleys, with narrow widths and constrained rights-of-way, and that the proposed dimensions were intended to match the existing neighborhood context. The third waiver concerned the 175-foot sight-distance requirement. Kurl noted that the area was heavily controlled by stop signs in all directions, and although the full 175 feet could not be achieved due to urban constraints, visibility to the stop signs was clear and safe. The fourth waiver involved the 75-foot clear sight triangle requirement. Kurl explained that existing structures and the tight geometry of the neighborhood made compliance impossible, and the applicant was requesting a reduction to 20 feet, which he argued was appropriate given the stop-controlled nature of the intersections. The fifth waiver related to street lighting. Kurl stated that four existing cobra-head streetlights were already located at the corners of the block, and that future homes would include dusk-to-dawn lighting on both the front and rear of each unit, providing adequate illumination for sidewalks and parking areas.

President Washington raised questions regarding whether the subdivision was tied to a specific development plan.

Kurl and Nace clarified that while a schematic layout had been prepared by Murphy & Dittenhafer showing clusters of three- and four-unit townhome groupings, the architecture had not been finalized. The schematic merely demonstrated what could fit on the lots, and no vertical

construction plan was being approved.

Nace then explained that although the RDA owned the land, it was under a redevelopment agreement with Four Square Development and Construction. The RDA had contracted with RGS to complete the subdivision work on Four Square's behalf to expedite the project, given time constraints and funding considerations. He stated that the RDA intended to sell the land as 20 fully entitled lots rather than 14 unprepared ones.

President Washington asked whether the project was intended as affordable housing, and Nace confirmed that the development concept had always been for affordable housing.

Michael Walker, Representative for Four Square Development, requested that the City Solicitor state on the record the legal and procedural basis for Council acting on the subdivision given that the administration had issued a December 12, 2025 letter canceling the RFP for the project and declaring it non-viable. He questioned how Council could proceed with land development approvals for a project the administration had formally terminated and asked whether Council's action would have any legal effect independent of that termination.

Assistant Solicitor Schweikert responded that while ARPA funding for the project had been canceled, the RDA's decision to subdivide its land was independent of financing. The RDA, as landowner, had the authority to prepare its property for future development, and the subdivision was not tied to any specific developer or funding source.

President Washington expressed concern about conflicting information noting that within minutes Council had heard that the land was being prepared for Four Square, that Four Square had received a termination letter, and that the land was being positioned for any developer. She further stated that the waivers were not supported by staff and that the overall scope of the project was unclear.

Motion to pull. President Washington made a motion to pull the resolution from the agenda for further discussion. The motion was seconded by Dennis but FAILED by the following vote: Yeas - Dennis, Washington - 2; Nays - Bupp, Johnescu, Buckingham - 3.

Michael Walker, representing Four Square, referenced the May 21, 2024 Council approval of ARPA funding for the project ([Res. 49 of 2024](#)). He stated that ARPA rules required allocations to be finalized by December 31, 2024, and argued that the administration's cancellation letter did not meet federal or state requirements for deallocation. He declared that the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED), under Act 11, was the oversight body for ARPA funds in the Commonwealth and that Council should not vote on the resolution until DCED responded to inquiries submitted earlier that day. Walker warned that proceeding without DCED clarification could expose the City to audit liability. (**Note:** The complete email correspondence pertaining to M. Walker's DCED communications and ethics statement is appended to Resolution 49 of 2024, as Resolution 24 constitutes the originating source of the referenced materials.)

Mayor Helfrich responded by stating that the City had relied on its professional ARPA consultants since 2021 and had followed their guidance at every step. He explained that the consultants, along with internal and external staff, had determined that the project could not meet federal deadlines and that the City could not risk a failed project or potential federal claw backs. He reiterated that the subdivision was paid for by the RDA and was unrelated to ARPA funding. The RDA added that staff disagreements with waivers were common and that the Planning Commission had recommended approval. They emphasized that the subdivision was not tied to any vertical development and that the RDA had worked extensively with Four Square on zoning and design matters.

Walker again addressed Council, insisting that DCED was the proper oversight authority under state law and that the City was treating the matter like a standard RFP rather than an ARPA-specific process. He urged Council to wait for DCED's determination.

Mayor Helfrich countered that the City worked directly with Treasury and its ARPA consultants and questioned the relevance of DCED to this particular process.

Fred Walker, Four Square Development, then spoke, stating that Four Square had an agreement with the RDA for the land and had invested approximately \$20,000 into engineering and project preparation. He disputed the RDA's claim that it had paid the full RGS bill and described repeated instances in which the City had moved the goalposts. He stated that Four Square had provided financing commitments, including a \$3 million commitment from Members 1st Credit Union, and that the City had rejected or ignored documentation. He expressed frustration and emotional strain caused by the delays and asserted that the ARPA funds had been allocated to Four Square. He requested that Council refrain from voting until DCED responded and asked that all actions be paused. (**Note:** Email correspondence from F. Walker pertaining to the \$3 million ARPA allocation is appended to Resolution 49 of 2024, as Resolution 24 constitutes the originating source of the referenced materials.)

Vice President Buckingham noted that any ARPA reallocation would require a separate Council vote and that she now understands the subdivision to be separate from ARPA funding.

Kim Robertson, Business Administrator, clarified that the land itself was not tied to ARPA funds and that the inter-agency agreement with DCED covered the purpose of the funds—affordable housing—not the specific developer.

Mayor Helfrich added that Council had approved the RFP process but no agreement with Four Square had ever been finalized. Therefore, the ARPA funds remained in the affordable housing category and would return to Council for future allocation. He reiterated that Resolution 91 concerns only the subdivision of land and has no bearing on ARPA funding.

Michael Walker again emphasized that Act 11 designated DCED as the oversight agency for ARPA funds and stated that the Mayor was incorrect in dismissing DCED's role. He emphasized that the project and land were tied together under the ARPA RFP and urged Council to delay action.

There being no further discussion, Resolution No. 91 PASSED by the following vote: Yeas - Bupp, Johnescu, Buckingham - 3; Nays - Dennis, Washington - 2.

Final Passage of Bills/Resolutions

3. Final Passage of Bill No. 31, Ordinance No. 30 - A Bill
Approving the 2026 York City Budget. ([View](#))
Introduced by: Betsy Buckingham
Originator: Mayor / Business Administration (Finance)

Final Passage of Bill No. 31, Ordinance No. 30, Session 2025, A Bill approving the 2026 York City Budget, which was introduced by Buckingham at the November 18 meeting of Council and read by short title, came up for final passage. On motion Buckingham, seconded Washington, Bill No. 31 came up for discussion.

Kim Robertson, Business Administrator, provided an explanation regarding a previously identified concern about a potential 27th pay period in the upcoming fiscal year. This issue had been raised by Councilwoman Bupp, prompting a deeper review of the payroll calendar. The Business Administrator explained that initial research—supported by conversations with multiple

professionals—suggested that depending on how the calendar year begins, bi-weekly payroll cycles can occasionally result in 27 pay periods. Out of caution, and to avoid underfunding personnel costs, the administration had originally included the cost of a 27th pay and associated FICA and related expenses in the proposed budget. However, after revisiting the finalized payroll schedule for the upcoming year, which is typically set later in the calendar year to account for holidays and necessary adjustments, the Business Administrator confirmed that only 26 pay periods will occur. As a result, an amendment was prepared to remove the unnecessary salary and FICA allocations. This amendment reduces the overall budget by approximately \$1.22 million. Business Administrator Robertson noted that several line items tied to salary-related costs were adjusted accordingly. Additionally, updated totals by fund were provided to reflect the revised expenditures and corresponding revenue adjustments. A significant outcome of this correction is a reduction in the amount needed from the Wastewater Treatment Plant Fund (Fund 28). The required transfer decreases by \$1,158,151, bringing the total drawdown to \$29,570,167—just under \$30 million. Of that amount, only \$22.5 million represents principal and prior earnings, with the remainder expected from projected earnings during the year. She emphasized that the ordinance itself constitutes the official budget and committed to producing a fully updated document showing proposed-to-amended changes once the amendment is adopted.

Motion to amend. A motion was made by Buckingham, seconded by Washington, to amend the budget to reflect the correction outlined by the Business Administrator. The motion to amend PASSED by the following vote: Yeas - Bupp, Johnescu, Dennis, Buckingham, Washington - 5; Nays - 0.

Council President Washington reflected on the city's financial management challenges in recent years. She noted that although essential services continued, the budget process had too often been characterized by delays, limited transparency, and the absence of timely audits. Budget documents were frequently released only hours before hearings, hindering meaningful review. She emphasized that the lack of completed audits prevented the city from fully understanding its financial position and risked noncompliance with state and federal requirements. She also expressed concern that Mayor Helfrich did not attend the November 18 legislative meeting to provide a formal presentation and introduction of the 2026 budget, which she felt undermined public accountability. She further noted the absence of a proposed 2026 budget statement outlining priorities for the coming year. Despite these concerns, she stated that rejecting the budget would jeopardize continuity of city services and create uncertainty for employees and residents. She therefore supported moving forward, while urging the incoming administration to prioritize transparency, disciplined financial management, and timely reporting.

Michael Walker (Resident) raised a procedural inquiry under Robert's Rules of Order, asking the Assistant Solicitor to confirm whether the proposed budget had been reviewed for compliance with GASB standards, the Municipal Authorities Act, and the Third-Class City Code, including restrictions on the use of one-time funds.

Assistant Solicitor Schweikert stated that Mr. Walker's comment has been received and the vote could proceed. Mr. Walker responded that the lack of a proper "yes" or "no" response should be reflected in the record as a "no".

Councilwoman Bupp then offered additional comments, echoing the Council President's earlier remarks. She noted that reviewing the 2026 budget was difficult due to the absence of comparative reporting from prior years. She highlighted that payroll represents approximately 37% of the total budget and increased 13% from the previous year, reaching \$53.6 million. She also expressed concern about a 60% increase in health insurance costs without a clear explanation, noting that although the city has been self-insured for decades, it was unclear what measures had been taken to control expenses. She apologized for not pushing harder for financial transparency and emphasized that required financial reporting ordinances were not

being followed. She reminded the public that the 2019 audit—presented only this year—contained findings that may still be unresolved. While acknowledging that the wastewater treatment plant sale and ARPA funds provided the city with over \$200 million and helped maintain a flat tax rate, she stressed the need for ongoing cost efficiencies and competitive bidding to preserve long-term financial stability. Her priority, she stated, is keeping taxes and fees as low as possible for residents and businesses.

There being no further discussion, Bill No. 30, Ordinance No. 29, as amended, PASSED by the following vote: Yeas - Bupp, Johnescu, Dennis, Buckingham, Washington - 5; Nays - 0.

4. Final Passage of Bill No. 32, Ordinance No. 31 - A Bill
Approving the 2026 Tax Rate. ([View](#))
Introduced by: Betsy Buckingham
Originator: Mayor / Business Administration (Finance)

Final Passage of Bill No. 32, Ordinance No. 30, Session 2025, A Bill approving the 2026 Tax Rate, which was introduced by Buckingham at the November 18 meeting of Council and read by short title, came up for final passage. On motion of Buckingham, seconded by Washington, Bill No. 32 came up for discussion.

Councilwoman Bupp said there was a choice to reduce the tax rate with the Wastewater Treatment Plant (WWTP) proceeds, but she feels it is best to reserve the WWTP funds and keep the tax rate the same.

Mayor Helfrich explained that while they could have used proceeds from the Wastewater Treatment Plant (WWTP) sale to slightly lower taxes, it was strategically better to preserve the principal. He claimed that by keeping the principal intact, the fund generates perpetual dividends to offset rising costs, whereas a small tax cut would benefit residents minimally while depleting future income.

There being no further discussion, Bill No. 32, Ordinance No. 31, PASSED by the following vote: Yeas - Bupp, Johnescu, Dennis, Buckingham, Washington - 5.

5. Final Passage of Bill No. 33, Ordinance No. 32 - A Bill
Amending the FY2025 Budget. ([View](#)) (\$24,535.44 - For the York County Opioid Settlement Funds Program)
Introduced by: Edquina Washington
Originator: Economic & Community Development (Health)

Final Passage of Bill No. 33, Ordinance No. 32, Session 2025, A Bill amending the FY2025 Budget in the amount of \$24,535.44 for the York County Opioid Settlement Funds Program, which was introduced by Washington at the December 2nd meeting of Council and read by short title, came up for final passage. On motion of Washington, seconded by Johnescu, Bill No. 33, Ordinance No. 32 PASSED by the following vote: Yeas - Bupp, Johnescu, Dennis, Buckingham, Washington - 5; Nays - 0.

Note: Bill No. 34 Amending Part 13 "Planning & Zoning Code" to clarify definitions of rooming/boarded houses ([View](#)) will be on the 1/5/2026 legislative agenda for consideration of passage.

New Business - Introduction of Bills: None

New Business

6. Resolution No. PULLED - A Resolution
Terminating a police officer. ([View](#)) (Steven Reid)
Introduced by: Edquina Washington
Originator: Police
7. Resolution No. 92 - A Resolution
Approving reappointments to various boards. ([View](#)) (HARB & Zoning)
Introduced by: Betsy Buckingham
Originator: Council

Resolution No. 92, Session 2025, A Resolution approving the following reappointments: Reappointment of Carlos Santiago as an alternate member of the Historical Architectural Review Board to serve until the first Monday of January 2031; Reappointment of Blake Gifford as an alternate member of the Historical Architectural Review Board to serve until the first Monday of January 2031; and Reappointment of Sena Jenkins as a member of the Zoning Hearing Board to serve in said capacity until January 1, 2031, was introduced by Buckingham, read at length, and on motion of Buckingham, seconded by Johnescu, Resolution No. 92 PASSED by the following vote: Yeas - Bupp, Johnescu, Dennis, Buckingham, Washington - 5; Nays - 0.

XI. Requests for Future Meetings: None

XII. Administration Comment

Mayor Helfrich, in his final meeting, admitted that the budget and finance processes "absolutely need to improve". He apologized for his absence from budget hearings, stating he felt he was "getting out of the way" to let Council work.

XIII. Council Comment

Councilwoman Dennis delivered a farewell, explaining she was not seeking reelection for health reasons. She encouraged the incoming administration to dig deep and do thorough research.

President Washington read a statement celebrating the historic all-women council and the legacy of courage and compassion they established.

City Clerk Thompson bid Mayor Helfrich adieu, honoring his career from recording Council meetings in 1997 as a YCAT (now WRCT) volunteer in 1997 to becoming what she called a "second chance mayor" who cared about his community, and made difficult decisions that included mistakes and successes. She applauded his efforts and his service.

XIV. Adjournment: There being no further business, the December 16, 2025 meeting of Council adjourned at 7:31 pm.

XV. Resumption of Public Comment Period (at the discretion of the presiding officer): None



Dianna L. Thompson, City Clerk



Edquina Washington, President of Council