

## **PINELANDS PERSONNEL & BUDGET COMMITTEE MEETING**

This meeting was conducted in-person and available remotely.

The public could view/comment through Pinelands Commission YouTube link:

<https://www.youtube.com/c/PinelandsCommission>

**August 19, 2025 2025, 9:30 a.m.**

### **MINUTES**

**MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE: Remotely:** Chairman Alan W. Avery Jr., Commission Chair Laura Matos (left meeting at 10 a.m.), Commissioners Nicholas Asselta, Mark Lohbauer, and William Pikolycky (joined meeting at 9:57 a.m.). Also remote was Governor's Authorities Unit representative Michael Elenski.

**MEMBERS ABSENT: Ryck Signor**

**STAFF PRESENT:** Jessica Lynch **Remotely:** Executive Director (ED) Susan R. Grogan, Charleen Cruz, April Field and Evan Bossett

#### 1. Call to Order

Chairman Avery called the Pinelands Personnel & Budget Committee meeting to order at 9:37 a.m.

#### 2. Adoption of the June 24, 2024, Personnel & Budget Committee meeting minutes

Commission Chair Matos moved the adoption of the minutes of the June 24, 2025, Personnel & Budget Committee meeting. Commissioner Asselta seconded the motion. All voted in favor. The minutes were adopted.

#### 3. Fiscal Year 2026 Budget Discussion

ED Grogan said the draft FY 2026 Budget (attached) presented today will be submitted to the full Commission in September. ED Grogan said the draft budget was emailed to her contacts in Treasury so they may get their reviews started.

Jessica Lynch, Business Services Manager, gave an overview of the four budgets: Operating, Pinelands Conservation Fund (PCF), Fenwick Manor Preservation Fund and the Katie Fund.

ED Grogan said the Commission received an additional State appropriation of \$69,000 for the Fenwick Manor Preservation project, which will offset costs. She said additional funds are to be appropriated for safety and stability improvements needed at Fenwick Manor. Staff will be working on documenting and submitting costs to Treasury for approval.

ED Grogan delivered a presentation (attached) of the Fiscal Year 2026 Initiatives, including those funded by:

- A National Park Service grant of \$298,000. This is on a federal fiscal year basis, covering October through September;
- Energy Conservation Reserve;
- Pinelands Conservation Fund (PCF) accounts: Land Acquisition, Conservation Planning & Research, Community Planning & Design, Education & Outreach;
- Fenwick Manor Preservation Budget; and
- Katie Fund Budget

Commissioner Asselta asked if the Commission has started to look at other options for Health Benefits as the state health benefits plan is rapidly deteriorating. ED Grogan said it has been discussed, and staff will be looking at options. She said there are a couple of things to be considered, one being should the Commission leave the state health benefits program. She explained that the Commission is not considered a state entity for purposes of health benefits. The Commission is considered a local entity, which has different implications. She said the Commission has heard that costs for state employees are going to go up for health benefits, but for locals they are going to go up two or three times that amount. This is what the Commission is facing because it is a local entity. She questioned if there is a way to change the Commission's categorization as a local entity. Commissioner Asselta asked if the Commission was entertaining conversations for other options at this point. ED Grogan said not yet, noting that the Commission is just getting started. She said the Commission has a contract in place with the Union through June 2027, providing time to explore options this year.

Commissioner Pikolycky stated that if other vendors could match current benefits, it would not be a conflict with the union. ED Grogan said she is not sure if that is something that needs to be negotiated or something that can be done cooperatively with the Union. Commissioner Pikolycky said if they match what is currently offered, it should not be an issue. He said this is what other municipalities are doing. His concern is if the Commission waits until the contract runs out, costs could be very high, causing financial stress. He said many municipalities have already made changes, adding that this is something to be done as quickly as possible. ED Grogan agreed.

Chairman Avery said he agrees with his colleagues. He said as a member of the Ocean County Utilities Authority (OCUA), they are starting the process of looking at the same issues. He said he will share any insights he gains through the process. He said the Commission must consider the impact on the retired employees as well. He said this should be the topic of a committee meeting. ED Grogan agreed, adding that it can possibly be discussed at the next committee meeting in October.

Commissioner Asselta said Commissioner Pikolycky's comment about expediency is important because as the New Jersey health plan collapses, it is going to be more expensive moving forward as more towns are opting out. He said Commissioner Pikolycky has an excellent point that it could happen quickly. He said the Commission should start quickly by identifying some available options.

Chairman Avery said the director of the Division of Local Government Services in the Department of Community Affairs (DCA) made a presentation at a recent conference and said

that the state health plan is going to go away for local units due to cost. He said there are vendors who might be willing to come and offer presentations or provide some insights into the programs that are potentially available. He said the increases will have a devastating impact on the employees. Commissioner Lohbauer asked Commissioner Avery if these increases are affecting retirees. Commissioner Avery said it has not affected his costs, but he said he does not know how it affects local retirees. He said Ocean County has made changes to remove itself from the state health program. He said he agrees with Commissioner Pikolycky and Commissioner Asselta that this issue needs to be looked at sooner rather than later.

Commissioner Avery, on behalf of the Commission, thanked the Commission Chair for her advocacy in Trenton, the governor's authority unit liaison for their assistance and for working with ED Grogan in getting the financial increases. He also thanked the Director and staff for putting together another good budget that addresses the needs of the Commission.

Commissioner Lohbauer made a motion to recommend the FY 2026 Budget to the full Commission. Commissioner Asselta seconded the motion.

Commissioner Lohbauer said he appreciates all the remarks and agrees that it is a fabulous budget. He said it is great to see the increases in funding from the State, and he appreciates the effort that all participants have made. Commissioner Avery thanked Jessica Lynch.

All voted in favor. The motion passed.

#### 4. Update on Fenwick Manor rehabilitation project

ED Grogan said the Commission is moving along with pre-qualifying construction companies, noting that submissions are due by August 22, 2025. The New Jersey Historic Trust (NJHT) and the Commission will review the submissions to determine the list of pre-qualified bidders. When the Commission is ready to begin the work, the Request for Proposal (RFP) will go to the pre-qualified bidders. The consultants have done several site visits; they are working on technical specifications and designs; the Commission should have these by end August. The Preservation in Progress sign is being installed in front of Fenwick Manor on August 19, 2025.

#### 5. Financial Updates:

- a. Check Register –Jessica Lynch, Business Services Manager, highlighted the more noteworthy purchases/checks on the register for June 2025 and July 2025.

Notable purchases mentioned for June 2025 (FY2025) were transmitters for snake projects, Treasury chargeback for April telecommunications, laptops, an additional Office 365 license, replacement of bulbs in lobby & TDM room with LED, professional services associated with the Science offices work, a Very High Frequency (VHF) tracking receiver for NPS Studies, Science supplies, Jeep repair, and professional membership renewals.

Notable purchases mentioned for July 2025 (FY2026) were transmitters for snake projects, Union dues, replacement laptops (10) and desktops (12), tracking units for Science, tree trimming and removal, chargeback for May telecommunications, Science supplies, Constant Contact renewal, and advanced payment to the New Jersey Office of Information Technology (NJOIT) for two replacement servers.

- b. Electronic Disbursements – EFT, Direct Deposit, ACH (April 2025 – June 2025)  
Ms. Lynch highlighted the Annual Employer Pension payment, which was a small decrease from the previous year.
- c. Application Fees – Ms. Lynch stated that net application fees received for FY25 are \$976,267.38 which exceeded the anticipated \$750,000.00 amount for FY25. For FY 2026, we received \$49,448.54 in July.

#### 6. Personnel Updates

Charleen Cruz, Human Resource Manager, reviewed employee actions and recruitment efforts.

Departing employees – Kim Laidig, Research Scientist 1, retirement effective December 1, 2025

New Hires – None

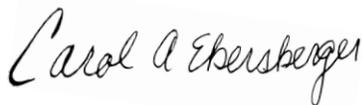
Recruitment – Research Scientist 3, posted, 13 applicants received to date

Leave of Absence – Theresa Melodick, May 8, 2025 – July 4, 2025, returned July 7, 2025

#### 7. Public comment – None

Commissioner Lohbauer moved to adjourn the meeting at 10:37 a.m. The motion was seconded by Chairman Asselta. All voted in favor.

Certified as true and correct:



Carol A. Ebersberger  
Business Specialist

August 28, 2025