

Disclaimer

These minutes reflect the actions taken by the Commission during its February 13, 2026 meeting. Although these minutes have been approved by the Commission, no action authorized by the Commission during this meeting, as reflected in these minutes, shall have force or effect until ten (10) days, Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays excepted, after a copy of these minutes has been delivered to the Governor for review, unless prior to expiration of the review period the governor approves same, in which case the action shall become effective upon such approval. These minutes were delivered to the Governor on February 19, 2026.

PINELANDS COMMISSION MEETING

MINUTES

February 13, 2026

All participants were either in-person or present via Zoom conference and the meeting was livestreamed through YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KbBy4dqRfHY>

Commissioners Participating in the Meeting

Nicholas Asselta, Alan W. Avery Jr., Deborah Buzby-Cope, Jerome H. Irick, Mark Lohbauer, Gaetano Matro, Mark Mauriello, Jonathan Meade, William Pikolycky, Jessica Rittler Sanchez, Douglas Wallner and Chair Laura E. Matos. Also participating were Executive Director Susan R. Grogan, Deputy Attorney General (DAG) Jay Stypinski and Governor's Authorities Unit representative Michael Eleneski.

Commissioners Absent

Theresa Lettman and Ryck Signor.

Call to Order

Chair Matos called the meeting to order at 9:31 a.m.

DAG Stypinski read the Open Public Meetings Act Statement (OPMA).

Executive Director (ED) Grogan called the roll and announced the presence of a quorum. Twelve Commissioners participated in the meeting.

The Commission pledged allegiance to the Flag.

Minutes

Chair Matos presented the open session minutes from the Commission's January 9, 2026 meeting. Commissioner Lohbauer moved the adoption of the minutes. Commissioner Buzby-Cope seconded the motion.

The open session minutes from the January 9, 2026 Commission meeting were adopted by a vote of 12 to 0.

The closed session minutes were adopted later in the meeting.

Committee Reports

Chair Matos provided a summary of the January 30, 2026 Policy and Implementation (P&I) Committee meeting:

The Committee approved the minutes of the November 21, 2025 meeting, as amended.

The Committee received an update from Chief Planner, Brad Lanute, on Jackson Township's Affordable Housing Plan and on the Commission staff's associated concerns. The Township requested and was granted an extension of our review period so they may address these concerns. Staff noted that the housing plan has sparked public interest and the Commission has received many public comments.

Chief of Legal and Legislative Affairs, Stacey Roth, presented an overview of the state's 2025 Public Notice law. Effective March 1st, the Commission is required to publish its legal notices on its website and create an archive of legal notices. She reviewed additional anticipated impacts on Commission procedures and rules.

Lastly, staff presented a 2025 year-end Local Conformance summary and review of trends as well as year 2026 anticipated activity.

Executive Director's Report

ED Grogan provided information on the following matters:

- On January 15, 2026, the State House Commission approved a land exchange between the owner of the New Egypt Raceway in Plumsted Township and the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP). Approximately 4.54 acres of undeveloped land within Colliers Mills Wildlife Management Area will be conveyed to the Raceway in exchange for approximately 21.58 acres of undeveloped land owned by the Raceway in Plumsted Township, Ocean County.

- The State Auditors provided a draft Fiscal Year 2022 Audit Report. Staff is in the process of preparing a response. In the next two months, the Commission will be asked to adopt the Audit Report by resolution.
- The Request for Proposal for the Fenwick Manor Rehabilitation project has been shared with the four pre-qualified bidders. A mandatory pre-bid site inspection has been scheduled for February 19th. After review of the bids, staff will make a recommendation to the Personnel & Budget Committee on March 17th and it's anticipated that the Commission will vote to award the contract at the April Commission meeting.
- New staff member Tyler Christensen was introduced. He began working at the Commission on January 26th as a Research Scientist.

Chuck Horner, Director of Regulatory Programs, provided information on the following regulatory matters:

- The Comprehensive Management Plan (CMP) allows the Executive Director to make an emergency determination to prevent danger to health, life and safety, after consultation with the Commission Chair. In the beginning of January, South Jersey Gas contacted the Commission advising that their well failed and the office building in Folsom Borough no longer had water or fire suppression capabilities. After consulting with the Chair, the Executive Director issued a letter authorizing the replacement well and advised that an after-the-fact development application must be completed.
- The Commission recently issued a Certificate of Filing for the construction of a Dunkin restaurant in Maurice River Township. The Commission certified a redevelopment plan that allowed this use at a specific location.
- Staff held a pre-application meeting with Southampton Township representatives about constructing a new municipal building on the site of the existing municipal complex, which is located on Route 206 north and Retreat Road.
- Staff is reviewing an application for the development of a single family dwelling in Evesham Township. A portion of Kenilworth Road runs through the 12- acre parcel and is not located within a municipal right-of-way. The location of the existing paved road presents zoning and environmental challenges.

April Field, Chief Permit Administrator, providing the following application updates:

- In late January, staff met with representatives of the New Egypt Raceway regarding a number of violations that occurred on the property. Staff first advised the property owner of the violations back in 2022. The violations include the surfacing of approximately 12 acres for the establishment of a commercial trailer storage area, the construction of two buildings associated with the commercial vehicle storage area and the construction of racetrack, roads and parking area improvements within the grassed infield of the existing racetrack. There are violations on the portion of the land that will be conveyed to the

Raceway from the state as part of the land exchange. The violations will need to be addressed. The property owner said they plan to submit a restoration plan for the establishment of a commercial trailer storage area.

- Staff recently met with the owners of Frog Rock Golf Course, which is located in Hammonton. The main clubhouse was destroyed by a fire in October. The owners plan to reconstruct the clubhouse and will have to address some development on the parcel that occurred without application to the Commission.

Gina Berg, Director of Land Use Programs, provided an update on the following items:

- Staff attended a meeting coordinated by the South Jersey Transportation Planning Organization related to a 21- mile bike trail proposal that would begin around Monroe Township in Gloucester County and proceed through Buena Vista Township and on to Hamilton Township. A few other counties are also proposing trails, including Burlington County.
- Staff coordinated a meeting with a property owner and the State Agriculture Development Committee (SADC) Farmland Preservation Program to clarify the use of a Pinelands Development Credit (PDC) deed-restricted parcel. Differences in each program were discussed.
- The Pinelands Infrastructure Trust Fund (PITF) was created by a Bond Act dating back to 1985. The Commission is required to implement and award funds to certain projects in Pinelands Regional Growth Areas by creating a Pinelands Infrastructure Master Plan. The last amendment to the Pinelands Infrastructure Master Plan was adopted in 2019, at which time grant and loan funding was awarded to five projects. Due to lack of progress on some of the projects, staff recently sent letters to award recipients requesting a status update. Galloway Township advised that they were still interested in pursuing its sewer extension project. Staff will be meeting with Pemberton Township, the NJDEP and the Infrastructure Bank. Pemberton Township has used part of the funding for its water improvements project, which is happening in phases. Staff will be discussing future amendments to the Pinelands Infrastructure Master Plan with the Commission.
- At the upcoming February P&I Committee meeting, a project summary will be provided for the Stafford Township accessible trails projects. A cell tower plan amendment will also be on the agenda.

Commissioner Avery asked if any other project recipients had responded to the Commission about its PITF status.

Director Berg said Winslow Township withdrew its request for funding back in 2022. She said Jackson Municipal Utilities Authority and Manchester Township, co-sponsors of a water and sewer project, advised the Commission they are no longer pursuing the project. Monroe Township has not responded to the Commission's project update request.

Stacey Roth, Chief, Legal and Legislative Affairs, provided the following updates:

- The Commission DAGs are currently in court filing a motion to compel testimony in the Artistic Materials matter. During deposition of the defendant, it became apparent that documents requested during discovery were not provided. Another deposition of the defendant may need to be scheduled.
- Staff will be meeting remotely with the South Jersey Transportation Authority (SJTA) regarding a project proposed in the Auxiliary Development Area on the Atlantic City Airport property. It's unclear at this time if a new or amended Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the Commission will be required. Should SJTA need an MOA for the development, the details of the proposal will be presented at a future P&I Committee meeting.

Chair Matos asked about the timing on today's court proceedings.

Ms. Roth said a decision would be provided today. She said expert witness depositions have been scheduled for March. After that, motions will be filed, followed by a three-day trial scheduled for June.

Brad Lanute, Chief Planner, provided the following updates:

- Evesham Township's Planning Board will be holding a public hearing on February 19th on a proposed Master Plan amendment. The amendment includes changes necessary to implement the recent CMP amendment redesignating the Black Run watershed from Rural Development Area to Forest Area. Once the Master Plan amendment is adopted, the Township Council will be able to adopt an implementing ordinance to rezone the area consistent with the CMP's Forest Area requirements.
- Jackson Township submitted a Master Plan amendment and several ordinances that were discussed at last month's P&I Committee meeting. Since that P&I meeting, Commission staff met with Township representatives to discuss a variety of issues, with particular emphasis on the CMP constraints associated with the sites in the Rural Development Area and the Pinelands Village of Cassville that are targeted for high-density inclusionary housing. Staff also discussed the CMP standards related to density increases in the Regional Growth Area. Staff will continue to engage with the Township in the weeks ahead, guiding the Township toward an affordable housing plan and zoning changes that staff can recommend for certification. The Township requested, and was granted, an extension of the Commission's review period on these items through May 3rd.
- The Commission has received a number of public inquiries regarding a development proposal in Monroe Township. The site is located in the Hexa Builders Redevelopment Area along the Black Horse Pike in Monroe Township's Regional Growth Area. In May 2023, the Commission certified the Hexa Builders Redevelopment Plan, which amended the site's zoning to allow warehouse development and established a PDC requirement for non-residential development. Certification of the redevelopment plan did not approve a specific project; it changed the underlying zoning regulations. A separate development

application was required to be submitted for the proposed development. A development application was later submitted proposing a 1.6-million-square-foot warehouse and distribution center. The Commission issued a Certificate of Filing in December 2024. As proposed, the project would require the redemption of 22.75 PDCs. In early 2025, the Township amended the redevelopment plan to permit data centers. Commission staff determined that amendment did not raise a substantial issue with respect to the CMP and could take effect. The Township Planning Board granted preliminary site plan approval on January 8th for a warehouse and distribution center. Staff is waiting for submission of the municipal approval and approved plans. Before any municipal approval can take effect, the approved plans must be submitted to the Commission and reviewed for consistency with the CMP. While the proposal could be amended to include a data center, Commission staff would review the development application to ensure that it meets the minimum environmental standards of the Commission.

Paul Leakan, Communications Officer, shared the following updates:

- Staff has been heavily promoting the 37th Annual Pinelands Short Course through social media. The event is scheduled for March 7th at Stockton University. More than 350 people have registered so far.
- Staff has written, edited and designed the Commission's 2025 Annual Report. The 40-page report will be on the Commission's March agenda.
- Staff is working closely with the Office of Information Technology to update the Commission's website in order to be in compliance with the requirements of the legal notice law.

Public Development Projects and Other Permit Matters

Chair Matos introduced a resolution recommending approval of a Waiver of Strict Compliance.

Commissioner Lohbauer made a motion Approving With Conditions an Application for a Waiver of Strict Compliance (Application Number 2022-0128.001) (See Resolution # PC4-26-02). Commissioner Mauriello seconded the motion.

Director Horner said the applicant is proposing to build a single family dwelling on a 1.8 acre parcel located in Jackson Township's Regional Growth Area. The dwelling will be serviced by a septic system. The waiver is necessary because the 300 foot buffer to wetlands standard cannot be met. (See attached aerial).

Director Horner briefly explained the Waiver of Strict Compliance rules. He said the standards were created in order for a property to have a minimum beneficial use.

Commissioner Rittler Sanchez asked if the five-foot depth for the seasonal high water table standard was met.

Director Horner confirmed that the seasonal high water table is greater than five-foot.

The resolution was adopted by a vote of 12 to 0.

Public Comment on Development Applications and Items Where the Record is Open

No one from the public provided comments on the two public development applications.

Adoption of the Closed session minutes

Chair Matos presented the closed session minutes from the Commission's January 9, 2026 meeting. Commissioner Lohbauer moved the adoption of the minutes. Commissioner Pikolycky seconded the motion.

ED Grogan said that the closed session minutes will be revised to clarify that Commissioner Lettman was not present during the closed session. She had been listed as both present and absent.

The closed session minutes from the January 9, 2026 Commission meeting were adopted by a vote of 11 to 0. Commissioner Mauriello recused from the vote.

Presentation: Science Office Research Update

Chief Scientist John Bunnell provided details on the Science Office's research and monitoring covering various aspects of the Commission's long-term environmental monitoring program, including the monitoring of groundwater levels in forests, surface water levels in ponds, water quality in streams, frogs and toads in ponds, and rare snakes and snake fungal disease. An overview of the king snake study and the box turtle study were also provided.

Link to the full presentation:

<https://www.nj.gov/pinelands/home/presentations/PC%20Research%20February%2013%202026%20PC%20Meeting.pdf>

Chair Matos commended the Science office for its useful information and fascinating work.

Commissioner Rittler Sanchez asked about the incubation success rate of snake eggs.

Chief Scientist Bunnell said that the Science office has been very successful. He said sometimes an egg is not fertilized. He also noted that by hatching the eggs in a controlled environment, mortality from predators decreases.

Commissioner Buzby-Cope asked if there was an average pH in ponds that keep the frogs and toads healthier.

Chief Scientist Bunnell said the high pH levels found in Pinelands ponds attracts frogs that can tolerate it. He said it acts as a refuge for them while bullfrogs and other non-native frogs don't do well in the high pH ponds.

Commissioner Lohbauer asked if there was a way to disinfect snake dens after they are vacated to lessen the chance of snake fungal disease.

Chief Scientist Bunnell said based on studies undertaken by scientists at Virginia Tech, once the snake has contracted the fungal disease, it remains in their system.

Commissioner Lohbauer asked whether there is any safe time for Enduro events to occur, based on the snake activity data. He suggested that maybe the Commission should reevaluate the criteria for permitting Enduros and share the data with the NJDEP because they also have a role in permitting the Enduro events.

Chief Scientist Bunnell said the best approach would be to route Enduro events away from snake hibernacula.

Commissioner Mauriello said the Science Office's data and work is highly valued and useful. He said the research isn't just for use in the Pinelands Area but throughout the coastal plain.

General Public Comment

Margie Marranca of Manchester Township said she has questions related to an ordinance that the Commission will not certify. She said Manchester Township originally wanted to change a residential zone to a light industrial zone. She said keeping the zone residential could allow for the development of 293 dwellings, which would be located directly outside of the River Pointe community. She raised concerns about traffic and water supply. She said her community has been working with the Commission for four years to gain permission to use irrigation wells. She said she imagines there are threatened and endangered species on the site proposed to be developed. She said she is looking for guidance from the Commission to explain the issue with the ordinance.

Chair Matos advised that public comment is just that, not a question and answer session. She said a staff member can provide information after the meeting.

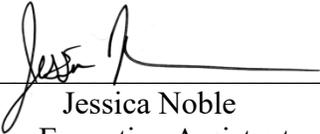
Norman Hoffner of Manchester Township said the water restrictions at River Pointe are damaging and devaluing homeowners' properties. He raised concerns about wetlands, traffic issues and existing water usage associated with future development in the vicinity of the River Pointe community, which consists of 504 homes.

Commissioner Irick requested that staff provide the Commission with information related to the issues raised by the public commentators at a future meeting.

Adjournment

Commissioner Pikolycky moved to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Buzby-Cope seconded the motion. The Commission agreed to adjourn at 11:24 a.m.

Certified as true and correct:



Jessica Noble
Executive Assistant

Date: February 19, 2026

