

Township of Maple Shade
Business and Economic Development Commission
Maple Shade Municipal Building – Senior Room
May 20, 2025 – 6:30PM

Meeting Minutes

I. CALL TO ORDER 6:32PM

II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

- III. PUBLIC NOTICE** of this meeting, pursuant to the Open Public Meetings Act, has been given by the Director of Business and Economic Development in the following manner:
1. Notifying the Township Clerk December 27, 2024.
 2. Mailing Notice to the Courier Post, The Central Record and Burlington County Times on December 27, 2024.
 3. Posting Notice on the Official Municipal Bulletin Board on December 27, 2024.

IV. ROLL CALL

J. Bennett*	X	K. Johnson*	X	J. Nixon	✓	C. Thomas*	✓
G. Capate	✓	C. Kauffman*	X	B. Norcia*	✓	S. Torrey*	X
L. Carsillo*	X	B. Loomis*	✓	S. Nunes*	✓	K. Tunney	✓
S. Danson	✓	A. McVeigh*	✓	F. Punzi	X	E. Wallace*	✓
A. Egner	X	J. Mortimer*	X	D. Smith*	✓		

V. CHAIRWOMAN'S PRESENTATION

The Commission welcomed two new members:

David Smith introduced himself to the group. He shared that his involvement began through his son's Eagle Scout project, which included building the platform at the train station. He is now continuing to support efforts to improve the station and contribute to the town. David works in sales and is also a musician, performing in Big Bleu Band based in Maple Shade. He expressed his interest in helping the community and being actively involved with the group.

Gina Capate also introduced herself. Gina is a long-time Maple Shade resident, a member of the Board of Education, and actively organizes the county's Toys for Tots initiative. She shared that while she prefers not to talk much about herself, she's always ready to work hard and contribute. The group warmly welcomed her.

J. Nixon provided an overview of Future Forward, a two-part visioning initiative held with Maple Shade High School students. The sessions offered insight into how students view the Township today and what they envision for its future. A key takeaway was the clear communication gap between the Township and its youth, with many students unaware of programs and events already being offered.

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Collaborative solutions discussed included: promoting the Township's Linktree, sharing announcements through the high school's morning broadcast, creating a student liaison for newsletter contributions, and establishing a Township Instagram to better reach younger audiences. The initiative fostered meaningful dialogue and uncovered opportunities for greater school-town collaboration.

The full Future Forward Student Visioning Report is attached to these minutes.

B. Norcia made a suggestion to possibly explore the idea of student representation at Township meetings, modeled after the Board of Education's student representative. The Board's student rep attends meetings regularly, shares highlights of upcoming and past school events, celebrates student achievements, and brings forward student concerns—ranging from serious issues to everyday matters like cafeteria feedback. It was proposed that a similar role could be created for the Township Council or BEDC meetings, potentially rotating among students. The idea is to establish a direct and consistent student voice in local government. It was noted that students are welcome to attend and speak at Council meetings without needing to be accompanied by a parent or be 18 years old. This could be coordinated through a class or program, allowing different students to participate and share brief updates or concerns. The suggestion was well received, and it was recommended to bring the idea to council for further discussion and consideration.

After wrapping up the Future Forward sessions, the Township hosted 20 freshmen from Maple Shade High School for Students in Government Day. Students were divided into groups, selected a Mayor and Deputy Mayor, and rotated through key Township departments to learn about municipal operations firsthand. They visited the Manager's Office, Clerk, Finance, Tax, Recreation, and Fire Marshal, participating in interactive activities and real-world scenarios. The day ended with lunch and four mock Council meetings, all livestreamed-on YouTube. The event was a great success and reinforced the Township's commitment to engaging and educating future community leaders.

VI. PUBLIC PORTION

None

VII. TREASURER REPORT from Emily Wallace

Emily provided the Treasurer's Report with account balances as of May 3rd:

ABC Trust Account: \$7,890.10

BEDC Account: \$12,500.00

Pavers & Fundraising Account: \$4,921.07 (with approximately \$2,000 in pending expenses)

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VIII. OLD BUSINESS

1. Committee Reports

Committee: Budget & Funding | Chair: E. Wallace, S. Danson, J. Nixon & K. Tunney

Chair Wallace reported that the committee reviewed current finances and emphasized the need to identify spending priorities by November to allow time for fundraising and coordination with other committees. Anticipated expenses include approximately \$800 for the brick project, \$1,000 for masonry work, and around \$7,500 for a proposed mural. Additional items under consideration are holiday lights, replacement flags, and continued support for decorative lighting. The committee also discussed bringing in Township Planner Susan Gruel, with an estimated cost of \$1,500, to guide the BEDC in setting strategic priorities and effectively presenting recommendations to Council. Ms. Gruel brings experience from redevelopment efforts in communities like Red Bank and Asbury Park. A vote on these expenditures will take place once final costs are confirmed.

Committee: Ordinance Review & Business Policy Committee | Chair: J. Bennett, L. Carsillo, K. Johnson, A. McVeigh & J. Nixon

In the absence of Chair Bennett, T. McVeigh noted that the committee did not meet since the last BEDC meeting. However, she noted future discussions will likely align with the Township's ongoing work on the Master Plan and Council's wishes. The committee aims to explore ways to streamline the board approval process for new businesses, making it more accessible and efficient. Once the Township Planner, Susan Gruel, is engaged, her input will be valuable to both the Master Plan and this committee's efforts. A reminder will be sent to Justin to schedule a meeting to move this work forward or a new chair will be appointed if he is unable to.

Committee: Public Art | Chair: L. Carsillo, S. Danson, B. Loomis, J. Nixon, F. Punzi & E. Wallace

Chair Carsillo was unable to attend but she provided the following update: The committee met twice, on April 25 and May 4, and has identified two major projects. The first is repainting the train bridge over Route 73, commonly referred to as the "Trapp Bridge." The goal is to have this completed by December 31, 2025. Emily has secured the bridge dimensions and will coordinate with Maple Shade High School art students to create the design. While students will contribute the artwork concept, a professional will be hired to complete the actual painting. The project already has preliminary approvals in place. The second project is the development of a mural on Main Street, with a target completion date of December 2026. The Township is currently applying for a grant to support Main Street improvements, and if awarded, a portion of the funding may be allocated toward this mural. Several regional artists have been identified for potential engagement once mural locations are confirmed. Additionally, the committee is initiating outreach to Main Street property owners.

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Lynne conducted a walking survey and identified 12 potential mural sites. Business owners will either be approached in person or receive a formal letter from the committee to gauge their interest in participating.

Committee: Fundraising and Grant / Chair: J. Nixon, J. Bennett, B. Loomis & E. Wallace
Chair Nixon reported that the committee has been actively developing creative, purpose-driven fundraising ideas. In response to student feedback highlighting a lack of arts in town, the committee is proposing a Maple Shade Color Run & Walk 5K for the Arts, tentatively planned for the fall. The goal is to raise funds specifically for local arts initiatives, including murals, school arts programs, theater, and stage crew—ensuring transparency around how raised funds will be used. Additional fundraising concepts include a Maple Shade Day at the Phillies, where the Township would purchase a section of seats to resell as a community outing, and a Chili Cook-Off in February, inviting resident and business participation. A Super 50/50 Raffle is also under consideration. As the BEDC is not a 501(c)(3), the committee is exploring a partnership with Sustainable Maple Shade, who would manage the raffle, with proceeds split to support community-benefit business grants. Lastly, the committee is researching a Maple Shade merchandise store through a print-on-demand platform that would require no upfront cost, with profits supporting BEDC initiatives. A joint meeting with the Events Committee is scheduled for June 30 to finalize plans and determine next steps.

Committee: Event Planning / Chair: B. Loomis, J. Nixon, L. Carsillo, A. Egner, F. Punzi & S. Torrey

Chair Loomis reported that the committee met on May 19 and had a productive session. The group is planning several community-focused events, including Community Connections Day tentatively scheduled for October 12, designed to highlight local organizations, youth sports, school clubs, volunteer opportunities, and civic groups. The goal is to foster stronger community connections and increase resident engagement. The committee is also exploring a Silent Disco for students in grades 7–12, tentatively set for November. The event would involve wireless headphones and multiple DJ channels for a unique and inclusive party experience. Additional planning is underway for a Color Run/Walk 5K for the Arts, likely in September, in coordination with the Fundraising Committee. Proceeds from the run would support public art initiatives in Maple Shade. Other ideas discussed include a Maple Shade Day at the Phillies for seniors, a potential Chili Cook-Off, continued support for township events like Bubble Fest and the Noon Year's Eve Party, and participation in Small Biz Bash again.

C. Thomas suggested a long-term project idea to explore a public art installation featuring maple leaf sculptures or other symbolic items, inspired by a similar effort in

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Moorestown with the Nipper Dogs. This initiative could serve as both a fundraiser and a source of community pride.

Jessi Riera Culcay, a MSHS Student who was on the Future Forward initiative expressed her interest in joining the Public Art Committee.

IX. NEW BUSINESS/IDEA EXCHANGE

1. S. Danson suggested the Commission consider transitioning to monthly meetings, given the increasing number of initiatives and event planning discussions. With several time-sensitive projects underway, she noted the risk of losing momentum if meetings are too far apart—especially over the summer. To gauge interest and availability, an anonymous survey will be distributed to members, and the results will help determine whether a change in meeting frequency is appropriate.

2. T. McVeigh asked whether subcommittee meetings will continue and if the dates can be shared amongst the members. It was confirmed that subcommittees should continue to meet, regardless of whether the full Commission will transition to monthly meetings. While recent subcommittee meetings were held on short notice within the last five days—it was agreed that scheduling meetings further in advance would allow for better communication and broader participation. Though formal decisions are not made during subcommittee meetings, making their schedules known helps maintain transparency and engagement. Committee chairs are encouraged to plan meetings ahead of time so they can be shared with the full membership should anyone wants to sit in and participate.

3. Mayor Talarico and Deputy Mayor Zahradnik addressed the Commission regarding the BEDC's strategic goals and initiatives. They emphasized the importance of advancing priority items identified in the March strategy session, especially improving the business approval process. The Mayor advocated reducing bureaucratic delays, citing examples where past approvals were efficient and encouraging the return to streamlined procedures for similar-use businesses.

They discussed the need to eliminate unnecessary red tape and supported the creation of a checklist to help both residents and business owners better navigate the permitting process. Improving internal communication between departments and clarifying procedures were identified as the next essential steps. The Ordinance Review Committee was cited as key to advancing these reforms, with a target of having updates ready for Council adoption by fall and implementation by January 1, 2026.

The group also revisited the idea of publishing an annual Township events calendar. Although it is too late to launch this year, the goal is to release a printed and digital

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calendar each January, allowing the public to plan ahead. It was suggested that longstanding events be prioritized, with input from local organizations collected by early fall. Additional outreach and display opportunities, such as window coverings for vacant storefronts and sandwich boards on Main Street, were proposed as creative ways to promote events and beautify downtown spaces.

Mayor Talarico and the commission agreed and emphasized the importance of collaboration and clarity between various township entities and organizations to ensure fundraising, grant programs, and beautification initiatives are complementary—not competitive. It was agreed that each program should have clear goals and criteria to maximize participation and business impact. Ideas on standards were discussed as practical enhancements for long-term maintenance and aesthetic consistency. Participants also discussed revitalizing communication with business owners through clear expectations, incentives, and better visibility of township support—such as promotional signage, window coverings for vacant storefronts, and QR code displays in local businesses. The conversation extended to engaging apartment complexes and renters to foster a stronger sense of community, while acknowledging the perception gap reported by high school students.

The Commission recognized the importance of reaching beyond Maple Shade to attract visitors, turning one-time destinations—like gyms or chocolate shops—into community gateways. This included leveraging unique local assets, from the bowling alley to the park system, to help redefine Maple Shade as a regional destination for dining, events, and culture.

- X. NEXT MEETING is Tuesday, July 15, 2025 – *Notice is being forwarded in accordance with The Open Public Meetings Act.*
- XI. MOTION TO CLOSE
 - 1. Motion to close T. McVeigh
 - 2. Second to the motion B. Loomis
- XII. ADJOURNMENT 8:05PM

Future Forward Student Visioning Report

Compiled Summary of Youth Engagement Sessions

The Future Forward initiative brought together Maple Shade High School students for two in-depth engagement sessions aimed at capturing youth perspectives on the Township's long-term vision. The program provided a platform for students to step into the roles of planners, leaders, and visionaries, while giving the Township valuable insights into how young residents see and experience their community.

The most significant takeaway from both sessions was the discovery of a communication gap between the Township and its youth. While many of the students' ideas mirrored programs already in place, the lack of visibility highlighted the need to modernize and expand outreach strategies—especially across generational lines.

Session Highlights

Student Discussion #1 – Infrastructure & Walkability

- Students cited visibility issues and safety hazards (e.g., dumpster placement at corners, lack of signage).
- Missing or broken sidewalks make certain walking routes unsafe, particularly from the high school to Main Street.
- Suggestions included revitalizing areas near the train tracks and transforming vacant spaces into parks or natural seating areas.

Student Discussion #2 – Public Spaces, Buildings, and Community Atmosphere

- Students supported creating cohesive design standards for downtown businesses.
- They emphasized the absence of tree cover and shade on Main Street as a deterrent to walking and gathering.
- Recommended improvements included string lighting, outdoor seating, and later business hours to create a livelier downtown environment.

Student Discussion #3 – Mixed-Use Housing, Events, Parks, and Equity

- Strong support for mixed-use buildings with retail below and housing above.
- Students proposed new seasonal events and recreational races but acknowledged challenges from county-owned roadways.
- Noted that some neighborhoods feel less connected and called for more equitable planning.
- Expressed need for public fitness spaces like tracks and clearly defined walking loops.

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Student Discussion #4 – Housing, Affordability, Safety & Community Perception

- Students expressed concern about their future ability to afford living in Maple Shade.
- Mixed opinions on apartment life, particularly Fox Meadow, with some citing stigma and safety issues.
- Recommended cleaning up public spaces, enhancing police presence, and breaking down stereotypes through inclusive events.

Student Discussion #5 – Community Safety, Cannabis, Youth Empowerment, and Education

- Concerns about youth access to substances like THC and vapes, and the safety of what's being consumed.
- Mixed opinions on dispensaries, but most students favored regulated access over black-market risk.
- Frustration with lack of visibility for arts and student programs; called for school-town coordination in newsletters and outreach.
- Expressed need for more accessible career development and internship opportunities.

Student Discussion #6 – Cultural Representation, Equity, and Civic Engagement

- Students called for more events celebrating diverse cultures and heritage, including Black, Latino, and other minority histories.
- Most were unaware of the MLK historical marker in town and suggested improvements to honor it meaningfully.
- Emphasized the need for cultural representation on boards and commissions.
- Proposed food-based cultural events and marketplace-style gatherings.

Next Steps & Recommendations

Based on student feedback, the following actionable items are recommended for consideration:

- Promote the Township's Linktree more broadly, including to students and families.
- Partner with the high school's Mass Media class to include Township events in morning announcements.
- Establish a school liaison to submit student news and updates to the Township's monthly newsletter.
- Launch a Township Instagram account to better engage younger residents.
- Continue identifying public spaces for student-led projects such as fundraisers, art installations, and performances.
- Expand internship and volunteer pipelines between students and local businesses.

The Future Forward sessions made it clear that Maple Shade's youth are eager to be heard and included. Their perspectives provide a valuable foundation for building a more connected, inclusive, and forward-thinking community.