MINUTES

PLANNING BOARD

TOWNSHIP OF BERKELEY HEIGHTS, NEW JERSEY

Regular Meeting

April 8, 2026

The Regular Meeting of the Planning Board was called to order at 7:30 PM by Chairman Craig Johnson.

Mr. Johnson confirmed that the meeting was being held in conformance with the Open Public Meetings Act. Adequate notice of this meeting has been posted on the Township website and sent to the newspaper of record. The Agenda has also been posted on the Township website and bulletin board at the Municipal Building at least forty-eight hours prior to the meeting. The Agenda items will not necessarily be heard in the order listed and the meeting will not continue substantially past 10:30 PM.

Roll Call:

Members present were Mr. Johnson, Mr. Hall, Ms. Poage, Ms. Kingsley, Mr. Harris, Mr. Kraut, and Mr. Sternheim. Mr. Robertson, Board Attorney, and Liza Viana, Township Administrator, were also present.

Adoption of Minutes:
February 18, 2026 Regular Meeting
March 4, 2026 Regular Meeting

A motion was made by Ms. Poage. seconded by Ms. Kingsley, to adopt the Minutes of the Regular Meeting of February 18, 2026 as presented. The voice vote was 7-0.

A motion was made by Ms. Kingsley, seconded by Mr. Hall, to adopt the Minutes of the Regular Meeting of March 4, 2026 as presented. The voice vote was 7-0.

Courtesy Review:

Columbia Middle School Athletic Field, Block 1204, Lot 17 (OL-Zone)
The proposed plan for capital improvements at Lower Columbia Park area is being referred to the Planning Board for review and recommendation pursuant to NJSA 40:55D-31.

Debra Varnerin, Recreation Project Manager, reviewed the history of this project and the design of the new athletic field. She stated that the decision was made to make this a natural turf field rather than a synthetic field as a result of the discovery of wetlands. Ms. Varnerin discussed the drainage system, irrigation system, lighting, renovations including the entrance, resurfacing of the basketball courts, updating of the fences, repairs to the baseball field and replacement of some of the structures in the playground area. Ms. Varnerin also reviewed the sources of funding for the project.

In response to questions from the Board, Ms. Varnerin explained the roles of the Recreation Commission, Board of Education and the Township in the project, and the requirements of the DEP.

Vincent Vinegra, Harbor Consultants, presented a rendering of the proposed project and reviewed the improvements to the soccer field, basketball courts and baseball field. Mr. Vinegra discussed the problems that were encountered with the synthetic field and why it was determined that a natural grass field would be better. He noted that a DEP permit will not be required as long as it is a grass field. Mr. Vinegra described the improvements that will take place including removal of soil and replacement with sand and sod, fencing, moveable backboard for the basketball courts and parking lot improvements.

In response to questions from the Board, Mr. Vinegra stated that he will supply a list of similar fields nearby and the maintenance costs will be the same as at present. Ms. Varnerin stated that the field will be used as the home field for Columbia Middle School soccer and may also be used for field hockey, lacrosse and football and it will be lighted.

Discussion took place regarding the proposed improvements to the parking lot and it was noted that the resurfacing of the parking lot has been included in the Township referendum so it can be removed from this project.

In response to further questions, Mr. Vinegra described the drainage and stated that it will tie into the existing drainage system, the replacement of clay with sand will improve the drainage, the existing drains will be cleaned and the Township DPW will be responsible for maintenance. Ms. Varnerin stated that the bid documents are ready to go out, they hope to start the work in the summer with completion in the fall and there will be no impact on the playground camp.

<u>Open to the Public</u>

The hearing was opened to the public for questions or comments regarding the presentation.

Ed Gallitelli expressed concern about water runoff and the Recreation Commissions' jurisdiction over the fields and asked why this project was advanced independent of the Recreation Commission and without the Commission having a right of approval.

Ms. Varnerin stated that the Recreation Commission was included in the project working with the Board of Education and the Township.

Mr. Johnson stated that the Planning Board does not have the authority to resolve the issue raised by Mr. Gallitelli and suggested that he work with the Township on this issue.

Mr. Gallitelli also stated that when he was on the Recreation Commission any funds received through grants were not considered to belong to the Township.

Lisa Viana, Township Administrator, stated the funds are being used as applied for in the grant applications.

Joseph Iadanza asked questions regarding Ms. Varnerin's title, the involvement of the Recreation Commission in the presentation, cost of the project, the effect of the project on traffic on Columbia Avenue, whether the nearby residents are aware of the project, drainage, materials for the basketball court, how long the project will take to complete and if plastic or metal spikes will be allowed on the soccer field.

Ms. Varnerin stated that her title is Recreation Project Manager and there is no one from the Recreation Commission present at this hearing.

Mr. Vinegra stated that the drainage will tie into the existing system, runoff will not be increased, the basketball court will be epoxy over asphalt, the project will be completed in a few months and metal spikes will not be permitted.

Consideration of Resolution:
Resolution memorializing the action taken by the Board on April 8, 2026, with regard to the proposed capital improvement project referenced above.

Mr. Robertson reviewed the resolution and suggested that a Schedule A be prepared that would include the Board's comments and recommendations to the Council. Those recommendations include confirmation of formal approval by the Recreation Commission and removal of the improvements to the parking lot.

A motion was made by Mr. Hall, seconded by Mr. Harris, to adopt the above Resolution as presented. The roll call vote was 7-0 with Mr. Johnson, Mr. Hall, Ms. Poage, Ms. Kingsley, Mr. Harris, Mr. Kraut, and Mr. Sternheim voting in favor and none opposed.

Adjournment:
A motion was made by Ms. Kingsley, seconded by Ms. Poage, to adjourn the meeting. The voice vote was unanimous, and the meeting adjourned at 9:00 p.m.

Regina Giardina, Secretary Pro-Tem