

BOROUGH OF BERNARDSVILLE
Mayor & Borough Council Meeting Minutes
March 16, 2026

Mayor Mary Jane Canose called this meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. remotely via Zoom due to inclement weather. Present were Council Members, Al Ribeiro, Jeff Roos, Charlie Szrom, Rich Traynor, Christine Zamarra, and Ross Zazzarino. Also present were John Pidgeon, Borough Attorney, Nancy Malool, Administrator, and Anthony Suriano, Borough Clerk.

STATEMENT OF PRESIDING OFFICER

Notice of this meeting was provided to the Bernardsville News and Courier News, filed with the Municipal Clerk and posted on the Municipal Bulletin Board on December 4, 2025.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

OPEN SESSION

Mayor Canose opened the meeting to the public.

Fran Daley, Library Director, thanked the borough for the progress on the Library roof repairs and recognized both the contractor and the Public Works Department for working through difficult weather conditions. She also raised concerns regarding parking at the library, noting that despite signage designating certain spaces, there continues to be a shortage of available parking and patrons do not always comply with the posted restrictions. She said some library patrons expressed concern that a parking app could be difficult for them to use, and asked that these concerns be considered in future parking discussions.

Hearing no further comments, Mayor Canose closed the open session.

MAYOR & COUNCIL DISCUSSION ITEMS

Public Works Committee Report, Kevin Murray, Public Works Director, provided an update on the following topics:

Snow Removal / Cost Avoidance, Mr. Murray reported on the Borough's first season handling sidewalk and parking lot snow removal in-house rather than through subcontractors. He stated that if the Borough had continued using subcontracted services, the estimated cost for this year's snow operations would have been approximately \$82,667.80. By comparison, the estimated in-house cost, including labor, materials, fuel, maintenance, and allocated capital expenses, was approximately \$25,580, resulting in an estimated cost avoidance of about \$57,000. He also reviewed the downtown snow cleanup operation, noting that Public Works completed the work in-house over two evenings and one day, avoiding the need for outside contractors. He estimated an additional cost avoidance of approximately \$11,000, bringing the total snow-related avoided cost for the season to nearly \$68,000. Council members commended the Public Works staff for their work.

County Snow Cleanup Coordination, Mr. Murray recommended reaching out to Morris County to discuss whether the County could assist with or assume more responsibility for post-

storm snow cleanup on county roads, including areas where snow remains in parking lanes. Council agreed it would be worthwhile to inquire further and determine whether any existing agreements govern that responsibility.

Mailbox Replacement Policy, Mr. Murray raised the issue of the Borough's mailbox replacement policy, noting that the existing policy appears to be informal and caps reimbursement at \$50. He explained that a recent damage claim involving a significantly more expensive mailbox prompted review of the policy. He suggested increasing the reimbursement cap to \$100, which he indicated is more consistent with neighboring municipalities. Council generally supported formalizing the policy and agreed that it should be memorialized by ordinance so it can be clearly referenced in the future. It was also noted that a standardized claim form could be handled administratively and posted on the Borough website.

New Jersey American Water – Payment in Lieu of Paving, Mr. Murray reported that the Borough had been working with New Jersey American Water regarding roadway restoration associated with recent utility work. Rather than requiring paving in certain areas, the Borough reached a tentative agreement for a payment in lieu of paving in the amount of \$161,000. He explained that the payment would relate primarily to work associated with the West Boylan / Prospect / Center Street water extension project, while some areas, such as the train station lot and a section of Boylan Street, would still remain the utility's responsibility due to concerns about future settling. He stated that the funds could be used toward the Borough's pavement management plan, future roadway projects, or other paving needs, subject to Council direction. A resolution will be required once the utility provides final documentation.

Trash Can Collection / Sanitation Contract, Mr. Murray also reviewed the Borough's contract for public trash can collection, noting that the annual cost is now just over \$18,000. He stated that the contractor is billing for approximately 50 trash cans, but that Public Works does not currently have a full inventory of all can locations. He recommended bringing trash can collection in-house, explaining that Public Works employees are already collecting recycling from parks and public areas and could service the trash receptacles at the same time with minimal added labor. He estimated a conservative annual savings of approximately \$10,000 if the Borough were to discontinue the outside service. Council supported the idea of conducting a full inventory and location audit of the public trash cans before making any final changes.

Council members thanked Mr. Murray for the presentation and noted the continuing value of Public Works' efforts to reduce outside contracting costs through in-house operations.

Mobile MVC Unit, April 2nd at the Bernardsville Library Parking Lot, the event is not expected to take place on April 2nd, as the MVC expressed concern about whether there would be sufficient parking at the Library. It was noted that the Borough has hosted the mobile unit at that location in the past without issue, and that this was communicated back to MVC. Fran Daley, Library Director, advised that although the Library has regular programming and daily traffic, she believed the site could still likely accommodate the mobile unit based on prior experience. She said MVC's concern appears to be focused on parking availability, rather than use of the building itself. It was further noted that alternative locations had previously been explored, including Bernardsville Centre and other Borough sites, but MVC had declined those options due

to requirements such as dedicated Wi-Fi and restroom access. A response from MVC regarding whether another date can be arranged is being awaited and the April 2nd date will not be used.

Raritan Headwaters Selling Well Testing Kits at Borough Hall, June 8th through June 12th, council agreed to have Raritan Headwaters have well testing kits available at Borough Hall from June 8th through June 12th with a return date of June 18th. A resolution will be on the March 23rd council agenda for approval.

The Historical Society of the Somerset Hills, Portrait of Frederic P. Olcott, Mayor Canose said we have a proposed loan agreement with the Historical Society of the Somerset Hills regarding a donated portrait of Frederic P. Olcott. She said the portrait is approximately the same size as the existing large portrait displayed in the council meeting room and is proposed to be hung on the opposite wall, which is currently vacant. The Historical Society was seeking a location where the portrait would be publicly visible and regularly seen, rather than displayed at the Brick Academy, which has more limited public access. Mayor Canose said Borough Hall was considered an appropriate location due to regular public traffic and public meetings held in the meeting room. It was also mentioned that the Historical Society may hold a small ceremony or public event once the portrait is installed. Under the agreement, the portrait would be loaned to the Borough indefinitely, with the Borough responsible for its care and protection from damage. A resolution will be on the March 23rd council agenda for approving the acceptance of the portrait.

Communication Consultant, Ms. Malool and Mayor Canose had a recent meeting with Ross Traphagen regarding communications consulting services for the Borough. Ms. Malool said that one of the Borough's key goals for the year is to improve public communication, particularly by providing timely, concise, and understandable updates about Borough projects, construction, ordinances, and municipal operations. She said the consultant could potentially assist with:

- drafting timely project updates,
- preparing plain-language explanations of ordinances and Council actions,
- creating FAQs,
- helping update and maintain website content,
- preparing monthly summaries or e-newsletters,
- and helping the Borough communicate proactively before misinformation spreads.

Ms. Malool estimated the service would cost approximately \$2,000 per month, though no formal proposal had yet been submitted. She said the intent was not necessarily to communicate every minor council action, but rather to improve the Borough's ability to share practical, relevant, and timely information with residents. Council members generally supported the concept and agreed that communication remains a top Borough priority, but also emphasized the need to ensure the Borough receives value for the expense and does not overcomplicate the effort. Suggestions included focusing on major issues, frequently misunderstood ordinances, and methods for delivering information effectively beyond simply posting to the website. Council agreed that a formal proposal or contract should be obtained and presented for review at a future meeting.

Digitization of Records, Ms. Malool discussed the status of proposals for the digitization of Borough records. She said it is part of a broader initiative to improve municipal technology,

efficiency, records preservation, and public access to information. She said that the issue has become increasingly urgent due to the risk of water damage, fire, mold, and other emergencies. She said the Borough stores a substantial number of records in multiple locations, including the attic, and that digitization would help safeguard those materials. She said digitizing records would also improve operational efficiency and potentially make OPRA requests easier to fulfill, as employees would no longer need to physically search through archived paper files. She further noted that the vendor being considered offers a public-facing document access option, which could allow residents to retrieve certain public records directly without having to file OPRA requests.

Preliminary Cost Estimates

Ms. Malool said she had originally requested \$200,000 in the budget to begin the process and has since received additional pricing information from the vendor. She advised that the most recent proposal includes:

- approximately \$113,000 for digitizing 200 planning and construction boxes, and
- approximately \$86,000 for planning and zoning documents currently stored at the Borough's Library Suite 103 office.

She said based on preliminary estimates across all departments and record types, the full Borough-wide digitization project could cost in the range of approximately \$700,000, which was lower than her initial rough estimate of \$1 million. She said her recommendation would be to approach the project incrementally, likely by digitizing the planning, zoning, and construction records first, if funding is made available.

Scope and Technology

It was noted that the records include not only standard-sized documents, but also legal-size materials, oversized maps, plans, blueprints, and construction documents. Ms. Malool said the vendor's technology includes OCR/search functionality, including the ability to recognize handwriting, which she described as a significant advancement in searchability and usability. She also advised that the current estimate covers approximately 4 million pages, with a substantial portion of the cost tied not simply to scanning, but to the indexing and organization of the records.

Future Workflow / Ongoing Digitization

Mr. Zazzarino asked how newly created records would be handled after the initial backlog is digitized. Ms. Malool said the vendor can provide ongoing scanning services on a monthly, quarterly, or annual basis, but that the Borough could also potentially transition to an internal scanning workflow once legacy records are addressed. She further noted that Planning and Zoning are moving toward requiring applicants to submit materials in digital format, which would help reduce future paper accumulation.

Retention / Destruction of Originals

Discussion also addressed whether the Borough would still need to retain original paper records after digitization. Ms. Malool said that while certain records — such as minutes, ordinances, and resolutions — must be retained permanently, other records may be eligible for destruction once properly digitized and retained in compliance with state standards. She said the proposed vendor works in coordination with the New Jersey records retention agency (DORES) and has protocols

in place to allow for lawful destruction of eligible paper records once digital preservation requirements are satisfied. It was also noted that the Borough would still retain its vault space for records that must be preserved permanently.

Council expressed support for the concept of digitization, while also raising questions about cost structure, including whether the vendor could provide a more detailed breakdown between:

- the cost of capturing/scanning documents, and
- the cost of indexing/searchability and AI-enhanced retrieval.

Council agreed that the vendor should be invited to a future meeting to give a presentation and demonstration, so that they can better understand the technology, workflow, cost structure, and implementation options before taking further action.

Somerset Hills Education Foundation (SHEF) 30th Anniversary Celebration, September 26th, Mayor Canose said a we received a request from the Somerset Hills Education Foundation (SHEF) in connection with its 30th anniversary celebration. She said SHEF is requesting permission to use the lower Polo field for a community event, generally in the same area where the Borough's prior food truck event was held. It was noted that SHEF has already coordinated with the Recreation Department regarding date availability, and the requested date is available. Mayor Canose said in addition to field use approval, the event organizers may also seek:

- a social affairs permit for a proposed beer garden, and
- a raffle license for a proposed 50/50

Council members supported the request. A resolution for approval will be on the March 23rd agenda.

Main Street Bernardsville Street Fair, council discussed a request from Main Street Bernardsville related to its planned street fair on June 14th. It was noted that the originally approved plan to close Route 202 has become significantly more expensive due to NJDOT detour and traffic control requirements. As a result, Main Street is considering moving the event to the train station parking lot instead of closing a portion of Route 202. Council discussed concerns about parking impacts, given that the train station is one of the largest parking areas in town and would be unavailable during the event. Alternate parking areas were discussed and it was suggested that Main Street provide a clear parking plan and public guidance if the event is moved.

Tie The Town Pink, Mayor Canose said "Tie the Town Pink" is held annually in October in recognition of Breast Cancer Awareness Month. She said the event involves placing pink ribbons throughout town as a show of support and awareness. A resolution for approval will be on the March 23rd agenda.

Presentations

Mayor Canose said presentations at the March 23rd council meeting will be the swearing-in of Police Sergeant Christopher Luckenbach and a proclamation for Parkinson's Disease.

Ordinances

Public Hearing of the following ordinances be held at the March 23, 2026 council meeting:

Ordinance #2026-2042, Supplementing and Amending Section 12-1.2 of the Borough Code by Adding an Exemption from Fees for a Continued Certificate of Occupancy Related to the Extension of Affordability Controls Under the Borough's Fourth Round Housing Element and Fair Share Plan

Mr. Pidgeon said that Ordinance #2026-2042 relates to the re-certification of affordable housing units and as part of the re-certification process, the units are required to be inspected. The purpose of the ordinance is to exempt affordable housing units from inspection fees, as it was determined that residents should not be charged for those required inspections.

There were no ordinances listed for **Introduction** at the March 23, 2026 council meeting:

Resolutions

The following resolutions will be on for adoption at the March 23, 2026 council meeting

--Bill List

--Authorizing the Borough of Bernardsville Police Department to Participate in the Defense Logistics Agency, Law Enforcement Support Office 1033 Program to Enable the Police Department to Request and Acquire Excess Department of Defense Equipment

--Appointing Jeff Horowitz to the Historic Preservation Advisory Committee (HPAC) to Fill an Unexpired Vacant Term to 12/31/26

--Awarding a Contract for the Purchase of a Police Vehicle Through the Bergen County Co-Op

--Changing the Scope of the West Street & Boylan Terrace Project

--Authorizing Refund of Stormwater Escrow Account 04-280-7110-0100, Bohr – 19 Oak Place

--Authorization of Tax Refund

--Purchasing Body Cameras Through State Contract

--Accepting the Resignation of Garrett Buchanan, Recreation Administrative Assistant

--Setting Recreation Camp/Vendor Fees for 2026

--Approving Emergency Temporary Appropriations

--Introduction of the 2026 Budget

--Awarding a Contract for Janitorial Services

--Authorization of Sewer Bill Adjustment

--Authorizing a Transfer of Appropriation Reserves

--Authorizing Millenium Strategies to File an Application for a Grant – US Congress—
Community Project Funding FY27

--Accepting the Resignation of Chris Diacik as Construction Official

West Street/Boylan Terrace sidewalk project, Mayor Canose asked about the change in scope for the West Street/Boylan Terrace sidewalk project. Ms. Malool said council had previously discussed placing the sidewalk on the south side of the roadway, where the homes are located. However, when the original plans were prepared, the sidewalk was shown on the north side, adjacent to the train tracks. Our Engineer advised that the north side is not feasible due to a significant drop-off and existing parking conditions. The requested scope change would

therefore move the sidewalk back to the south side, consistent with prior Council direction. It was noted that there is already an existing sidewalk on the south side, but it is deteriorated and the project is intended to reconstruct and improve that sidewalk, including connection to nearby pedestrian routes. Regarding whether residents on the street had been recently contacted regarding the project, it was explained that the Borough had already sent out a targeted Smart 911 notification to the neighborhood advising residents that the project would begin in the coming weeks. The contractor will distribute notices to each home, and the Engineer would be sending letters to approximately five residents whose front-yard landscaping may be affected.

Budget, Mr. Ribeiro discussed the proposed municipal budget, which is scheduled for introduction on March 23rd and public hearing/adoption on April 27th. The proposed budget includes a slight decrease in the municipal tax rate, while the total amount to be raised by taxation would increase due to higher property valuations. The Finance Committee also reviewed several items including increases in health insurance, salary obligations, insurance costs, repairs and maintenance, and reduced revenues. Council discussed the proposed use of approximately \$230,000 in additional revenue generated by higher-than-anticipated assessments. The Finance Committee recommended allocating the funds to the capital budget in order to strengthen reserves, reduce future borrowing needs, and provide flexibility for future equipment and infrastructure expenses. There was some support for retaining the funds in capital, citing long-term financial planning and the need to prepare for future capital costs. There were some questions about whether some or all of the funds should instead be used to provide additional tax relief or to address debt reduction, and requested greater specificity regarding the intended use of the funds. There was also discussion on reserve levels, long-term debt planning, and the importance of balancing taxpayer impact with long-term fiscal stability. Council discussed balancing tax rate relief with maintaining an appropriate capital reserve and continuing long-term debt reduction. The goal of gradually reducing the residential tax burden over time through increased PILOT revenue and additional commercial development, while avoiding significant year-to-year fluctuations in the tax rate was noted. The discussion focused on whether a portion of the available surplus should be returned to taxpayers through a lower rate or retained in capital reserves to fund future improvements with cash rather than debt. It was noted that departmental capital requests exceeded the amount currently budgeted, and that the reserve could also be used for unforeseen capital needs. The additional available funds resulted from higher-than-anticipated property assessments, which were estimated earlier in the budget process before final valuation figures were available. Council also discussed the importance of maintaining a capital reserve consistent with best practices, with a target of at least approximately 1% of the budget, or about \$200,000 total. Additional discussion included examples of deferred capital requests and resident requests for infrastructure improvements, such as pedestrian crosswalks and flashing beacons.

Mr. Roos left the meeting.

Council consent was to maintain a total capital reserve of at least approximately \$200,000, consistent with the previously discussed 1% reserve target. Based on that approach, any remaining available funds would be applied toward reducing the tax rate. Discussion reflected that, with approximately \$80,000 already in reserve, an additional estimated \$140,000 to \$160,000 would need to be allocated to capital in order to meet the target reserve level, with the

final tax rate to be adjusted accordingly. Leslie Roberson, CFO, will provide updated calculations the following day for confirmation prior to budget introduction.

Authorizing Millenium Strategies to File an Application for a Grant – US Congress—
Community Project Funding FY27, Mayor Canose said that the Borough submitted a federal Community Project Funding request for the dam removal project through the offices of Congressman Kean and Senator Booker. After consultation with the Borough Engineer, it was determined that the project may qualify under the applicable funding category. Millennium Strategies prepared and submitted the application due to the filing deadline. Mayor Canose said that any award would benefit the project, though the application process may delay the project start slightly. A resolution authorizing a grant application for this project to be filed by Millennium Strategies will be on the March 23rd council agenda.

Additional Resolutions not on the agenda, Mr. Pidgeon said five resolutions prepared by Matt Jessup relate to affordable housing. Three resolutions authorize escrow agreements with redevelopers, and two refer properties to the Planning Board to determine if they qualify as areas in need of redevelopment. Discussion clarified that the Planning Board would conduct any necessary studies, though the Borough’s planner may assist. All resolutions will be included on the March 23rd council agenda.

Municipal Attorney Report, there were no comments or questions from council about Mr. Pidgeon’s report. Some items will be discussed in closed session.

Council Liaison Reports

Board of Health, Mr. Zazzarino said the Board’s reorganization meeting was held at the Library with six of seven members present. A request was made to fill the vacant seventh seat. Discussion included ideas for website updates, consulting, and promoting Health Department events to increase public participation.

Environmental Commission, Mr. Szrom said the Green Fair is scheduled for April 25th at the Library. The Commission discussed establishing a nonprofit “friends”-type entity for the Environmental Commission to accept donations for projects like the dam, similar to the Friends of the Bernardsville Library. Rob Wilson, Chair, prepared a draft delineating open space responsibilities between the Environmental Commission and the Recreation Committee

Recreation Committee, Mr. Zazzarino said upcoming events include a tree walk at Cross Estate Gardens on April 19th, a Green Fair on April 25th, Kirkpatrick Park cleanup on April 26th, and a trail walk at Kirkpatrick Park on May 2nd with two additional events pending confirmation. Pool restoration plans include painting and tiling; Claremont fence to be completed by April 1st. Priscilla’s Pantry will stock the pool snack shack with grab-and-go items; lifeguards will assist in rotation. The Memorial Day parade planning is underway, including a special float honoring veteran Bob Walsh’s 100th birthday in early May.

Shade Tree Committee, Ms. Zamarra said the committee is currently revising the Shade Tree Ordinance. Once a draft is finalized and reviewed by Mr. Pidgeon, it will be given to council.

Library Board, Mr. Traynor said the Board did their annual review of Fran Daley, Library Director, which was stellar.

Outstanding Volunteers, Mayor Canose said eight nominations have been received. There will be a presentation to include background stories and a recognition plaque at Borough Hall for those receiving the award. Mr. Szrom and Mr. Zazzarino will assist Mayor Canose in reviewing the applications.

Correspondence - None

CLOSED SESSION

It was moved to adjourn to an executive session to consider Contract Negotiations, Personnel Matters, and Pending Litigation and that the time when and circumstances under which the matter can be disclosed to the public is when it is finally resolved. The motion was seconded and approved with five yes votes.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 10:07p.m.
