

## **Mayor's Address – January 5, 2026**

First, I would like to extend my heartfelt congratulations to Rich and Charlie on their election to the Council. Thank you both for your willingness to serve and for committing your time and energy to our community.

As we begin a new year, I want to express my sincere gratitude to my fellow Council members, our dedicated administration and staff, and the many volunteers who give so generously of themselves. While the wheels of government may sometimes turn slowly, when we work together, meaningful progress happens—and in 2025, we accomplished a great deal.

One of our key goals this past year was to better understand the priorities and concerns of our residents. To that end, we introduced FlashVote, a scientific survey tool for local governments. I am proud to say that Bernardsville is the first municipality in New Jersey to use this program. We conducted two surveys—one focused on how well we communicate with residents, and another on overall quality of life in our community. The results, which are available on our website, have already helped guide Council priorities.

Downtown revitalization has long been a Council goal, and the Quality-of-Life survey strongly reinforced its importance. Residents identified local business development and growth as our top priority. In response, we welcomed several new businesses, including Success on the Spectrum, Society Real Estate, and Forever Young. The Palmer Project was approved by the Planning Board in August, with construction expected to begin in 2026, eliminating several long-vacant storefronts.

In 2025, Bernardsville also achieved designation as New Jersey's 37th Transit Village. This milestone will open the door to new funding opportunities for future downtown improvements. Main Street Bernardsville is moving forward with plans for a new park at the train station to honor longtime Borough volunteer Ed English, and we restored the Millicent Fenwick statue for the first time since its installation in 1995.

Safety and security remain paramount for our residents. In fact, physical safety was identified in the Quality-of-Life survey as both the most important issue and one of Bernardsville's greatest strengths. We are extremely proud of our Police Department, which recently earned state accreditation, having complied with almost 200 standards that are regarded as the best practices in public safety. The Bernardsville Law Enforcement Foundation had another successful year supporting our officers, highlighted by an appreciation breakfast last month. The Somerset Hills Safety Committee, consisting of mayors and police chiefs, continues to address regional concerns and find ways to share resources. We also launched the Pace Car program to slow traffic and purchased new radios for our volunteer Fire Department to improve emergency communications.

In Recreation and Open Space, we continued to make progress on the Recreation Plan. Lighting was added to the Polo Grounds parking lot, and the walking path was completed to

improve access to the far fields. Our Recreation Department assumed management of the weekly Farmers' Market, easing the burden on volunteers, and hosted several successful community events, including the Taco Festival, Trunk or Treat, and Easter Eggstravaganza. We also completed the Highlands Center Feasibility Study as we work to preserve our open spaces.

Facilities and infrastructure improvements continued as well. Six roads were paved in 2025, including those in the Stirling development, Skyline Drive, and Hardscrabble Road. By bringing snow plowing and mowing operations in-house, consolidating Public Works roles, and using co-op vendors for tree removal, we saved over \$100,000. Three Round Three affordable housing sites broke ground and began construction. By building these ourselves, we avoided a builders' remedy that could have added hundreds of additional market-rate units.

Other accomplishments include earning the Healthy Town designation through the work of the Mayor's Wellness Campaign Committee. Bernardsville is also now listed on the City Health Dashboard.

We have continued to demonstrate strong fiscal stewardship by identifying efficiencies and cost savings. This year alone, we will save nearly \$130,000 by transitioning from the State Health Benefits Program to the New Jersey Health Insurance Fund. Over the past two years, our administrative team has helped realize \$1.5 million in savings.

Looking ahead to 2026, renovations to the former Audi dealership and Walter's Garden Center are expected to begin, helping better connect the shopping center to downtown. New Jersey Transit has informed us that a contract has been signed for train station repairs, and we hope to see the station reopen later this year. We will continue implementing the Recreation Master Plan, including construction of a pavilion with new restrooms. We will maintain strong fiscal management while investing in our community's future, and we will explore new ways to engage residents and keep them informed.

Our community is changing and growing. We have welcomed many new young families who have chosen Bernardsville as their home. Change within a community can be powerful—it creates space for new voices, fresh ideas, and stronger connections. The question is not how to stop change, but how we respond to it—with intention, not resistance—by listening first, staying grounded in our shared values, and working together to shape change in a way that benefits the whole community. When we approach change thoughtfully and collaboratively, it becomes an opportunity to strengthen who we are rather than lose what makes us special.

I am grateful for the opportunity to serve as your mayor. Over the past seven years, I have learned that collaboration is the cornerstone of progress and effective change management. The collective efforts of our committees, boards, organizations, businesses, neighboring communities, and school district make Bernardsville a wonderful place to live, work, and raise a family.

I wish you all a happy, healthy, and prosperous New Year.