

**OFFICIAL MINUTES  
BOROUGH OF BERGENFIELD  
MAYOR AND COUNCIL WORK SESSION  
MAY 5, 2026**

PRESENT: Mayor Arvin Amatorio, Council members Thomas A. Lodato, Buddy Deauna, Ora Kornbluth, Hernando Rivera and Marc Pascual

ABSENT: Council President Domingo Almonte

ALSO PRESENT: Borough Administrator Corey Gallo  
Borough Attorney John Schettino  
Borough Clerk Marie Quiñones-Wilson

Mayor Amatorio called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m. with the reading of the Open Public Meetings Act Statement, "In compliance with the Open Public Meetings Act, the notice requirements have been satisfied. Meeting dates for the year are confirmed at the Annual Meeting. The Annual Notice was published in the Record Newspaper, posted on the Municipal Bulletin Board and Borough website, and is on file in the Office of the Borough Clerk. In case of an emergency, exits are in the back and to your right. Please turn off all cell phones."

Mayor Amatorio led the salute to the flag.

CLOSED SESSION

RESOLUTION **26-136**/Authorizing the Governing Body to Enter into Closed Executive Session to discuss:

- A. Attorney-Client Privilege/Agreements
  - 1. Use of Parks and Playgrounds

Motion by Councilperson Pascual, seconded by Councilperson Rivera, that Resolution #26-136 be approved. All present voting in favor, none opposed. The meeting was adjourned to Closed Session in the Executive Chambers at 7:33 pm.

RETURN TO OPEN SESSION

On a motion by Councilperson Pascual, seconded by Councilperson Rivera, and all present voting in favor, the meeting returned to open session at 8:10 p.m. Roll Call. Council President Almonte is absent.

AGENDA CHANGES

None.

PRESENTATIONS

- A. Proclamation – ALS Awareness Month

Mayor Amatorio read a proclamation into the record to proclaim the month of May as ALS Awareness Month, highlighting Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS), also known as Lou Gehrig's disease, in the Borough of Bergenfield.

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS/BOROUGH ENGINEER

- A. Engineering & Inspection Status Report

Borough Engineer, Tino D'Amore of Remington & Vernick, stated that 2026 Road Improvement Program bid opening was held last Thursday. A recommendation to award the contract to D&L

Paving was made and the resolution is on tonight's agenda. If approved, the pre-construction meeting will be held next week, in hopes to have contractors start the work in two weeks by Memorial Day.

Mayor Amatorio inquired if there is only one contractor completing the work.

Mr. D'Amore stated that there is only one contractor completing the road program which includes seven roads and the two parking lots at borough hall, which are CDBG funded. CDBG is incorporated into the 2026 road program. There is also an NJDOT funded project that is a separate contract. We submitted our plans and specifications to NJDOT last week, and expect to hear back comments back from them in the next two weeks. We need to address the comments, acknowledge them, and then we can receive authorize to go out to bid for that project.

Councilperson Kornbluth inquired who was the contractor last year and whether the engineers were happy with the result.

Mr. D' Amore confirmed that Cifelli and Son General Construction Inc. completed the road work for the 2025 road program, and D&L Paving completed the NJDOT funded road, which was New Jersey Avenue. The work came out well.

#### ORDINANCE

None.

#### UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None.

#### NEW BUSINESS

None.

#### ADMINISTRATOR'S REPORT

Borough Administrator Gallo reported that last week, we held a 5K run to kick start the Mayor's Wellness Program. I am happy to report that we had 472 runners participate in the program. It was a great event, with a lot of community spirit and participation from different groups and sponsors. Our engineer went over the road program, but just to repeat for the record, the roads that are being done including North Queen, Harcourt, Brook Street, Rivera Way – which is the entrance of the PAL field, Wildrose, the north side parking lot, the parking lot by the cell tower, and roadways coming into Borough Hall. The NJDOT funded road is Porter Avenue. A meeting took place to finalize all the details of the Memorial Day parade, which will be held on Monday, May 25<sup>th</sup>. At 10 a.m., the Fire Department will have their ceremony at Cooper's Pond. The Veterans' Advisory Committee will have their ceremony at 11 a.m. at Borough Hall. In addition, we will be unveiling the new monument going into the monument area. At 12:00 p.m., we will start staging for the parade near Englewood Avenue, and proceed down Washington Avenue. The parade will start at 12:30 p.m. This event will kick off the Borough's 250<sup>th</sup> celebration of the independence of the United States. In addition to Memorial Day, Family Fun Day will also mark the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary. We plan to host more activities during the event, including an enhanced firework show. On Flag Day on June 14<sup>th</sup>, there will be an event at the Museum in Cooper's Pond. We're working on additional events as Councilman Rivera and the Mayor have been involved, and council members have worked on ideas to enhance the celebrations. Mr. Gallo referenced that one of the ideas we're thinking about is a potential watch party during the month of July for the World Cup. Hopefully USA advances and we can celebrate and support the team. We will also host several summer concerts and family night activities.

#### MAYOR & COUNCIL REPORT

Councilperson Lodato

stated that the Planning Board meeting was cancelled. The Zoning Board of Adjustment reviewed the application for 10 N. Washington Avenue, which is an existing commercial building. The applicant proposed a second story, which would contain two residential units. The application was deemed complete, but the board did not take a vote. They were 6 members present. One was absent, and there are no alternates on the board. The applicant's attorney requested that the application be carried to next meeting for possible a vote. Its been mentioned that there should be a meeting held with members of the Board of Adjustment, Planning Board, and the Mayor and Council, along with the Borough professionals, to have a discussion and exchange ideas relative to the development in town. Councilperson Lodato also reported that former Borough Attorney and Municipal Judge Steven Mueller, passed away last Friday, April 24<sup>th</sup>. He served this Borough when my father was Mayor from 1976 to 1982, and then when Kevin Clancy was Mayor. For 50 years or so, he maintained his law practice in town with his wife, Lynn Muller. It was sad to know of his passing; he was a longtime friend.

Councilperson Deauna

stated that the Mayor's Senior Advisory Board held a dance party at Saint Anthony's church, it was well attended. Mayor spoke lengthy about their positive education and contributions to the community. The Senior Board is looking forward to the Volunteer party in December. Councilman Lodato, Councilman Pascual, and Council President Almonte were also present at the party.

Council President Almonte

No report.

Councilperson Kornbluth

expressed her condolences to the Muller and Rivas families. She expressed that Mayor Rivas was a friend and a neighbor, and she used to enjoy their banter on Highgate Terrace, especially during paving. The Recreation Committee is working with the Mayor's Wellness program coordinating all the events, as well as Family Fun Day, and the spring sports program is in full swing. BVAC expressed their appreciation for the awards received. They have new members, but could use some additional volunteers.

Councilperson Rivera

stated that Mayor Rivas was great, I learned a great deal from him. He gave me advice and mentored me when I first joined the Council. My condolences to his family. He was one of the greatest citizens of Bergenfield. I have participated in many different activities, including the Senior's dance, which had more than 100 people attend. They were very happy and seemed very grateful and privileged to see the light each day. The Mayor's Wellness Program started successfully with the 5K run. More than 500 people attended. It was great to see many athletes in the Borough, but I especially admire Mr. John Smith. He has walked the 5K two years in a row. The Mayor's Wellness Program is offering many free activities during the

week, including Zumba, Yoga, Latin Dance, Line Dancing with tremendous success. We encourage all to participate. Some citizens during meetings he had, have expressed that some people are speaking on the reduction of taxes. Its unfortunate disgrace. It's difficult because I sit here and I see the budget, and really, I don't see how we can reduce the budget unless we suspend or reduce services. If we cut 4 to 5 Police Officers, we can reduce it. If we cut DPW workers and services to the fields and parks, we can do it. However, people will not like that. It's not easy to cut the budget, especially with inflation rising in the Country and the War, we are paying for it.

Councilperson Pascual

stated Memorial Day will be celebrated on Monday, May 25<sup>th</sup>. The Grand Marshall is going to be Marley Ganthier. Bergenfield Fire Department Ceremony will be at Cooper's Pond at 10 a.m., the Veteran's Ceremony will be at 11:00 a.m. at Borough, and the parade line-up will be at 12:00 p.m. The parade starts at 12:30 p.m. After the parade, everyone is invited to the Veteran's Post for hamburgers and hotdogs, thanks to the veterans. I was fortunate to attend the 3<sup>rd</sup> Strategic Planning meeting hosted by the school board on April 15<sup>th</sup>. The meeting was great. I was able to work with teachers, parents, and other professionals to exchanged ideas and discuss ways we can help our kids.

Mayor Amatorio

expressed his condolences for the passing of Mr. Muller and Mayor Rivas. I would also like to mention, the passing off a longtime member of the Bergenfield Fire Department, Richard Addon, who served for more than 40 years and also deserves our gratitude. Also, Telecommunicator Switzer retired from the Police Department last week and I extend my congratulations to her. The Mayor's Wellness, we have an intensive 6-week program running from Monday to Friday, with events each day. The kickoff was the 5K run, which was very well attended. Every activity has been well attended, even tonight, there were more than a 100 people at the Memorial Field doing for Zumba, and yesterday, there were many people participating in the bar method class. Tomorrow, there will be a yoga class offered and on Thursday, there is going to be a Latin dance salsa night, and Friday, we will have live dancing. These activities are available to our all our residents. If you know someone that would enjoy the event, invite them and join them, as this is free for everyone. I am very proud of our community. Because of all the donations received, we are able to offer these classes for free of charge. All these activities are offered because of the generous support of our community. This year alone, \$18,000 has been raised to fund the project. In the past 5 years, the program has almost collected \$45,000 from donations. We were also able to finance the 5K for free. All these activities have been financed through generous donations and registration fees, at no cost to the Borough.

## CORRESPONDENCE

- a.) Harper/Resident **RE:** Request to Reserve Memorial Park Pavilion for Birthday Party/Sunday, May 31, 2026/12:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.
- b.) Naylis/Board of Fire Officers **RE:** Personnel Action Letter dated April 22, 2026

Motion by Councilperson Pascual, seconded by Councilperson Rivera, and all members present voting in favor, to accept correspondence items. All present voting in favor, none opposed.

## PUBLIC COMMENTS

Mayor Amatorio opened the meeting to public comments and invited the public to comment on any subject, limited to five minutes per speaker.

Barry Doll, resident, stated that he has several questions. With regards to Resolution #26-145, which permits the Tax Collector to issue estimated tax bills, the amount is 107 million, estimated at 3.917%. He requested an explanation of how this impacts the residents in town. He stated that with the materials presented with the budget show a 9-9.6% increase, but now you have the school budget and most of the County budget estimated. He also requested an explanation on Resolution #26-148. He further inquired why the discussion on parks and playgrounds was a Closed Session item. He inquired what is involved that the discussion had to be kept from the public, unless it was another lawsuit. Mr. Doll also inquired how many lawsuits the Borough has, as the taxpayers are entitled to know this information. He also commented that in previous meetings and other residents have requested that the meetings be broadcasted for others to see, for the public to be keep up to speed. He also expressed that Councilman Lodato's point to have a meeting between Zoning Board of Adjustment and Planning Board is a great idea.

Fred Salhberg, resident, stated that he would like to discuss two matters. He stated that this afternoon, there was an emergency on the top of Phelps Avenue. There were four to five police vehicles speeding up Phelps Avenue. He stated that about five minutes later, there was an ambulance. He further stated that 6 to 7 minutes later, there was another ambulance. It must have been serious. He referenced that for several years, he has questioned the two ambulances on the one side of the track. If there were train passing, the ambulances would have been delayed. He stated that someone can die if there is no ambulance on this side of the track. He commented that a firefighter should be able to drive an ambulance. He stated that for the welfare of residents that live on this side, there should be ambulances on this side of the track. He further stated that the moment a gathering was held at Borough Hall for the former Mayor, the borough made a mistake, because it opened up pandora's box. He inquired if any Mayor can request this now. There are Councilmembers that have served this Borough for years. If something happens to them, and the family wants their ceremony here, will the Borough say no. We also have citizens that volunteer for the Borough. It will be an issue if the Borough says no to a resident or employee that passes away and the family wishes to have a ceremony here.

Nelson Reynoso, resident, stated that there are a many housing projects and developments going on in town. He would like to know more about the projects and how they will impact the infrastructure of the Borough. He also stated that there has been an influx of drugs into town. He understands that many want to turn a blind eye and ignore it, but he sees it. He stated that he doesn't see any action being taken. Mr. Reynoso also inquired how the Borough is going to regulate e-bikes in town, as traffic is a mess. We should act, as there are kids with no helmets. He stated that many Bergen County towns are acting, and he believes it is important that we act on it.

Mayor Amatorio questioned whether he has seen it for himself or heard of the drugs coming into town.

Mr. Reynoso stated that it's happening, people are speaking to him and telling him there are drugs in town.

Mayor Amatorio stated that if someone sees this happening, they should call the Police Department and report it.

Diana Flagg, resident, stated that Steve Muller was a very active and good Democrat. She thanked Councilman Lodato for bringing him up. She remembers he also served in Vietnam as a Lieutenant, he was a proud Veteran. She stated that with regards to Resolution #26-148, it states that the budget will be available for public inspection at the free public library. She questioned that when did we have a free public library, since we pay a fortune for the library. She said the resolution should be corrected because there is no free public library in Bergenfield. She also inquired why the ceremony was held for Mayor Rivas in Borough Hall. He never served on this dais. She also inquired why former elected officials of the Borough of Bergenfield were not invited. She inquired why an email wasn't sent out to former Mayors and Councilmembers to invite them. She expressed that the affair on Saturday was not inclusive. Mrs. Flagg also stated that with regards to services, one of the services to be provided with the new borough hall, was livestreamed meetings. She inquired when will this happen, we are paying for these services.

John Smith, resident, expressed that he was not going to speak, but statements were made tonight by people who never come to the meetings. He stated that to the individual that complained about the e-bikes, the Police Department have addressed it. Notices were placed on the Borough website and the Police Department website. The individual that spoke was also attached to the Board of Education for a number of years. He inquired what did the Board of Education do to educate the kids. He is correct in that Washington Avenue, and the children going to Roy Brown Middle School and the High School, are riding on the e-bikes. It's not only the Police, the Teachers should also speak to the kids. Mr. Smith stated that when they come up to speak about how the borough is going to cut the budget, they should also attend the Board of Education meetings to complain about the school tax, which is the biggest part of the taxes.

There being no one else who wishes to be heard, Mayor Amatorio closed public comments.

Borough Attorney Schettino stated that the reason the usage of the parks and playground was discussed in closed session is because legal advice had to be given with the ability to limit the use of the parks, and whether or not the Borough can limit the use of the parks when it is Green Acres funded.

Borough Administrator Gallo stated that with regards to lawsuits, they cannot be discussed in public. There are several personnel lawsuits that are active, and we have a pending litigation regarding the building, and another pending matter with a vendor who didn't act properly on a road project that was late, and we withheld payment. Mr. Gallo stated that we hold people accountable. Mr. Gallo stated that with regards to livestreaming the meeting, the Borough is equipped, we have the technology. But, there are pros and cons that have evolved overtime, and more and more towns are moving away from it because the recordings become sound bites, rather than taking the full context and using it properly. It becomes soundbites pieces for other purposes, rather than to watch and understand what is happening. When I look at things, I have to look at the big picture. He noted that pertaining to the emergency that occurred on Phelps Avenue, he will look into it, and see if we can formulate dual services. He confirmed that the BVAC does have SUVs that are not fully equipped for emergency services, he knows that members are equipped to also use their personal vehicles.

Mayor Amatorio also stated that in case of emergencies, the Police Department is dispatched first. We also have mutual aid agreements in place with other towns to ensure the entire Borough is covered. We will address the issues that you raise, but we know that other towns can cover us as well.

Mr. Gallo stated that there are several fallacies being through around. This was not a funeral, there was no corps or urn, it was a celebration. Respectfully, as much as I want to say no, the family, asked several times, to a point that they needed this for closure. Mr. Gallo stated he doesn't know if other families, Mayor, will need that, he cannot answer that question. In fairness, the human side kicked in, because the family needed this. It was a wish that his wife and daughters came in to speak with me and members of the governing body. We did the best that we could to deal with the circumstances. With respects to the invitation, we didn't invite anyone. It was placed on social media, and the family invited who they wanted to invite.

He further explained that with regards to economic development projects in town, there are several opportunities that are available and go through a process. There is an economic development team that is run by an engineering firm appointed by the Borough. When a plan is brought to the borough, it is reviewed by Zoning Board of Adjustment or Planning Board, and subsequently gets vetted and approved through that process. The infrastructure is reviewed in the process. Currently, we have no finalized plans. There is one development plan that went through Site Plan review, but its not approved yet. It is a work in progress.

Mr. Schettino further stated that in terms of the impact to development, the Planning Board has a hearing, they advertise in the paper when the application will be heard, that is the public's opportunity to attend and listen to the testimony of the engineers, architects, planners, and also ask question. If anyone has any questions or concerns, they should go to the Zoning Board of Adjustment meeting or the Planning Board meeting, because that is where you will receive answers to your questions.

Mayor Amatorio stated that during the hearings, especially the Site Plan meetings, all the departments are present. The DPW, BVAC, the Police Department, the Zoning and Traffic officers, all members are present for all to ask questions on the plans. If you are along Washington Avenue, the old Woolworth building at Main Street, they presented all the plans and traffic study at the Planning Board and Site Plan Committee. The Planning Board approved the plan, the Site Plan committee made suggestions, and now they have to go to the County to for approvals to widen road and sidewalks. There is no digging until all the approvals are received.

Mr. Gallo stated that with the regards to e-bikes, there is new State law, where the e-bikes are regulated at the State, but the Police Department will enforce the new regulations.

Mr. Gallo further stated that in terms of the issues with drugs, there are avenues to report the information. He stated that people can call his office directly, and it will be kept confidential. As a former narcotics detective, he takes much pride in trying to keep a clean town. For that reason, the borough decided to not have dispensaries when the opportunity presented to have them. Mr. Gallo expressed that the idea that the Borough isn't strong in the approach, anyone can report it and it will be addressed.

Councilperson Rivera stated that people should communicate with the Police Department regarding any issues with drugs and say something. He stated that since Nelson was part of the Board of Education, he asked what actions were taken by the board. Councilperson Rivera stated that he also heard that marijuana was moving through the schools, especially in the middle school. He asked that did he do, as the Borough has no power over the schools. We cannot put the Police Officers inside the High School and Middle School, because it is the school's responsibility. He asked what actions were taken as he also asked that there were drugs moving through the school.

Mr. Gallo stated that Resolution #26-145 will be discussed during the budget presentation.

Mr. Schettino stated the resolution authorizes the Tax Collector to mail estimated tax bills.

OFFICIAL BUSINESS TO BE ACTED UPON:

A. CONSENT AGENDA

**CONSENT RESOLUTION 26-137.** All matters listed below are considered by the Governing Body to be routine in nature. There will be no separate discussion of these items. If any discussion is desired by the Governing Body, that item will be removed from the Consent Agenda and considered separately.

- a. **26-138**/To Approve Bill List
- b. **26-139**/To Certify Compliance with the EEOC Enforcement Guidance on the Consideration of Arrest and Conviction Records in Employment Decisions Under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and sign the Group Affidavit
- c. **26-140**/To Approve Revised Veteran Tax Exemption – 32 Merritt Avenue
- d. **26-141**/To Approve Terminal Payout – Telecommunicator Jerilyn Switzer
- e. **26-142**/To Approve Waiver – Filming Application – Exit Right Film Company
- f. **26-143**/To Authorize Membership Participation and Cooperative Pricing Agreement – Riverside Cooperative
- g. **26-144**/To Approve Purchase – Manhole Covers & Frames for the Department of Public Works – Campbell Foundry Company
- h. **26-145**/To Authorize the Borough of Bergenfield Tax Collector to Prepare and Mail Estimated Tax Bills in Accordance with P.L. 1994 C. 72
- i. **26-146**/To Award Bid and Approve Contract – 2026 Road Improvement Program – D&L Paving Contractors, Inc.

Councilperson Kornbluth stated that she had a question pertaining to Resolution #26-142, the filming application. She inquired if Cooper’s Pond will be closed to the public during filming. She inquired if there will be Police presence.

Borough Administrator Gallo confirmed the park will be closed. He stated that they will be \$500 per day to the Borough, but will pay for all the additional costs for Police and DPW. He stated the film includes an impressive a-list cast, which is a great way to showcase our community.

Motion by Councilperson Rivera, seconded by Councilperson Kornbluth, to approve the Consent Resolution #26-137.

On a roll call, the vote was recorded as follows:

|                            |               |                          |            |
|----------------------------|---------------|--------------------------|------------|
| Councilperson Lodato:      | <i>aye</i>    | Councilperson Kornbluth: | <i>aye</i> |
| Councilperson Deauna:      | <i>aye</i>    | Councilperson Rivera:    | <i>aye</i> |
| Council President Almonte: | <i>absent</i> | Councilperson Pascual:   | <i>aye</i> |

B. RESOLUTIONS

**26-147**/To Approve Hire – Part-Time Summer Laborers

Motion by Councilperson Pascual, seconded by Councilperson Kornbluth, that Resolution #26-147 be approved.

On a roll call, the vote was recorded as follows:

|                            |               |                          |            |
|----------------------------|---------------|--------------------------|------------|
| Councilperson Lodato:      | <i>aye</i>    | Councilperson Kornbluth: | <i>aye</i> |
| Councilperson Deauna:      | <i>aye</i>    | Councilperson Rivera:    | <i>aye</i> |
| Council President Almonte: | <i>absent</i> | Councilperson Pascual:   | <i>aye</i> |

C. 2026 MUNICIPAL BUDGET

1. 26-148/To Read Budget by Title Only

Motion by Councilperson Pascual, seconded by Councilperson Rivera, that Resolution #26-148 be approved.

On a roll call, the vote was recorded as follows:

|                            |               |                          |            |
|----------------------------|---------------|--------------------------|------------|
| Councilperson Lodato:      | <i>aye</i>    | Councilperson Kornbluth: | <i>aye</i> |
| Councilperson Deauna:      | <i>aye</i>    | Councilperson Rivera:    | <i>aye</i> |
| Council President Almonte: | <i>absent</i> | Councilperson Pascual:   | <i>aye</i> |

2. Public Comments on the Adoption of the 2026 Municipal Budget

Mayor Amatorio opened public comments on the 2026 Municipal Budget.

Paul Lerch, Borough Auditor, presented the municipal budget and stated that the same has gone through extensive review by the State. He stated that although the borough is in a self-exam year, the borough requires State review because it is eligible for Urban Aid funding. He stated the borough runs a tight shape, but once you qualify for Urban Aid, the borough can no longer do a self-exam. The process went very smoothly as Trenton had minimal questions. The increase this year is more than most of us would want as an increase, but the reality is we have no choice. We are in a particular year that this has become very difficult. We are looking at a \$400 increase to the average home, which an average home is valued at \$320,000. He stated that the cost of living on average is being forecasted at a 4% increase for the United States. When I look at this, total spending is up 1.9 million dollars. This is something the borough can sustain without any material increases. The 1.9 million dollars is made up of three things. One smaller item is the pension bill, which is an increase of roughly \$214,000. The salaries and wages, the number is only going up 1%, which is roughly \$219,000. This is incredible, because contracts call for annual increases, especially Police and DPW which include step increases. The other major item is health insurance. Health insurance is up 1.3 million dollars from previous years, roughly 17%. This is not a high number in comparison to other towns facing 20%, 25%, and 30% increases for health insurance. This is roughly 1.79 million of the 1.9 million, almost all of it.

Mayor Amatorio stated the increase is beyond the Borough's control. The budget increase is not based on operations, but is led by contractual and pension payments.

Mr. Lerch stated that the amount the borough can control is minimal. All the expenses are built in.

Borough Administrator Gallo stated that health insurance is only up 17% because the Borough left State Health Benefits and joined the BMED. If the Borough was in State Health Benefits, the increase could have gone up to 36%. We were fortunate enough to notice this trend and pushed our way out of it, and joined the BMED in Bergen County. By doing that, we saved money. There is not an employee in the borough that received an increase and is making more than they did in the previous year, because their health insurance contribution also went up.

Borough Attorney Schettino inquired what numbers made up the estimated tax bills.

Borough CFO Cahill stated that he is required to collaborate with the Tax Collector to know what the final levy is. The tax levy is based on an equalized basis. The County number is shifting. The Board of Education number is final. He stated that with the estimate he put together, the increase will be less than \$600 on the average home, including library, County, school, and municipality.

Barry Doll, resident, stated he doesn't understand how the increase is less than \$600 when the School Board budget is up 9%.

Mr. Cahill stated that the way taxes are calculated, one portion is raised in one year, the other portion is raised the following year.

Diana Flagg, resident, stated that in previous years, a presentation was done with pie charts when the budget was voted on.

Mr. Lerch stated that this is the public meeting with a hearing. The hearing was publicized for all to attend to make comments or ask questions on the budget.

Maria Ng, resident, stated that with regards to health insurance, she asked if the borough can come together with another town.

Mr. Gallo stated that is what the Borough did. The borough pulled together with 36 towns, which is why we are saving 1.6 million. We were able to leave State Health Benefits and join another group.

Councilperson Rivera stated that if the Borough didn't join the BMED, the budget would have been increased to 2.6 million.

Mrs. Ng inquired how people can afford these increases in property taxes, how can we survive in this town.

Borough Attorney Schettino stated that the property tax issue is being faced in all towns.

Borough Administrator Gallo stated that health insurance is a State and federal issue. We as a town, we are hit with the bill. We did the best that we could to save money. We were able to leave and join another insurance group. Many towns were unable to leave. If we stayed in the State Health Benefits plan, it would have cost us 2.6 million, not 1.3 million.

Mayor Amatorio stated that the increase is 9% because we used surplus.

Mr. Lerch pointed out that although the increase is 9%, the average over the last 9 year has been 2.5% over that period of time. On average over that period, the taxes have gone up less than the cost of living, 2.5%. Last year we utilized 6.7 million in surplus to balance the budget, this year we are using 5 million. The remaining amount is roughly 1.4 million in surplus in 2026. Last year, we started with 2 million in surplus.

Mr. Gallo stated that we had to tap into the rainy-day fund. He expressed that the hope is that this all levels out and inflation regroups and levels, in the meantime, we need to burn the funds we have to maintain our discipline. It is upsetting, but we are maintaining our discipline pertaining to the budget. In terms of staffing, we are utilizing more part-time employees in order to offset medical costs and pension contributions.

Barry Doll, resident, expressed that we are utilizing 5 million in surplus, which leaves us with 1.4 million in surplus. He inquired what will happen next year, if we don't have this surplus. He inquired unless you are replenishing, but how will it be replenished.

Mr. Lerch stated that we hope that next year, the number will end the same as in 2025. In 2026 and in 2025, the surplus will be consistent, without having a decrease in utilization. The goal is to have 6 million in surplus.

Mr. Doll stated it is a good goal to have, but if you are planning to get out of a hole with 5 million in surplus, then something is wrong with the budget. The budget should break even, it should be balanced.

Mr. Lerch explained it is a reserve fund and every municipality has it. We average over 9 and 10 million, it is generated, and can be returned to the taxpayers. These funds have been set aside, and have been tapped into because it is a difficult year. We had to go into the surplus more aggressively. Otherwise we would have been facing a 15% increase.

Mr. Doll stated that we are all neighbors, we all live in this town, I have worked with all of you on different occasions, we have a friendly relationship, but we are here to express our views, trying to have a better operating situation in this town for everyone. We have foreclosures in this town. Real estate should be a point of interest. We are spending money on recreation, if we continue doing this, there will be no one to use the fields. The young people cannot afford to live here with the mortgage rates and taxes, it is too expensive. Affordable means we can buy things, live comfortably, with reasonable taxes. With the estimated increase, my taxes will be around \$12,000. I am fortunate, but many people cannot afford this. We are 33 million dollars in debt. That's a lot of money, it is paid gradually, but interest goes up.

Mr. Gallo stated that the bonds are set.

Mr. Doll stated that with the separation from schools and County, they receive their funding from our taxpayers. We need to get together with them.

Mayor Amatorio stated the school board makes their own decisions.

Councilperson Pascual stated he is the liaison for the Board of Education and has the same access as the public, but attends the meetings.

Fred Sahlberg, resident, stated he is an educated blue-collar man, he knows the things we have to do, and things we do not. I know that we need to take care of the employees with benefits and salaries. He inquired how many of you go to the back, and look at things in the budget we do not need. The employees and the safety of the public, no problem, we need to take care of the public. There has to be things we can cut. He also inquired if the accountant is present when the budget is reviewed. I hope that when I return to ask specific questions on the budget, that I receive answers.

Councilperson Kornbluth stated that everyone knows how fiscally responsible I am, and I am very careful with money. I have looked through this budget with a fine-tooth comb and I pushed back on this increase. We went over this budget time and time again. This budget is the best that we can do, this budget is bare bones.

Mr. Gallo further explained that we didn't increase a line item budget other than what we needed to. For example, IT services, cybersecurity, technology all cost money. We cannot do without this. The premiums for medical have gone up. On a family plan, the medical cost is \$62,000 a year. PFRS went up \$242,000, we are required to pay this amount. There is very little discretionary spending. He further stated that DPW is supposed to have 52 employees, we should be around 42 employees, but running with many part-times. We are about five employees light in the DPW, and three officers light in the Police Department.

Councilperson Rivera stated the proposal was initially 14%, but we pushed it to a 9% increase.

Diana Flagg, resident, stated that the street lights in Bergenfield, there are always lights out. She expressed that we all know what electricity costs nowadays. Ms. Flagg stated that if there is one light out, the borough should not pay PSE&G for that bill. She also inquired why the library needs more money, and why they are unable to operate with their set budget for one year. She commented that another way to have more money is through the reval. She inquired when the revaluation will be done. I through the borough was told that it needed to be done.

Mr. Gallo stated the situation with the library is no different from the Borough. Their budget has zero-line items, they have attrition in their budget as well, its all because of the medical cost increases.

There being no one else who wished to be heard, Mayor Amatorio closed public comments on the 2026 municipal budget.

**3. 26-149/To Adopt the 2026 Municipal Budget**

Motion by Councilperson Pascual, seconded by Councilperson Deauna, that Resolution #26-149 be approved.

On a roll call, the vote was recorded as follows:

|                            |               |                          |            |
|----------------------------|---------------|--------------------------|------------|
| Councilperson Lodato:      | <i>aye</i>    | Councilperson Kornbluth: | <i>aye</i> |
| Councilperson Deauna:      | <i>aye</i>    | Councilperson Rivera:    | <i>aye</i> |
| Council President Almonte: | <i>absent</i> | Councilperson Pascual:   | <i>aye</i> |

**COUNCIL COMMENTS**

The Mayor and Councilmembers thanked all for coming to the meeting.

Councilperson Deauna expressed his condolences to the Muller and Rivas family. He stated that Bob Rivas was a great friend and mentor. He swore me into office, he did many good things, and he thanks him dearly. His passing is a great loss.

**ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business to come before the Mayor and Council, on a motion by Councilperson Kornbluth, second by Councilperson Rivera and unanimously carried, to adjourn this meeting. The meeting was adjourned at 9:43 p.m.

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Marie Quiñones-Wilson  
Borough Clerk