

**OFFICIAL MINUTES
BOROUGH OF BERGENFIELD
MAYOR & COUNCIL REGULAR MEETING
JULY 21, 2026
8:00 P.M.**

PRESENT: Council President Domingo Almonte, and Council members Thomas Lodato, Buddy Deauna, Ora Kornbluth, Hernando Rivera, and Marc Pascual

ABSENT: Mayor Arvin Amatorio

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

Council President Almonte called the meeting to order at 8:03 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 is sent to the Record, Star Ledger, and Cablevision, placed on a Municipal Bulletin Board and is on file in the Office of the Borough Clerk."

The Salute to the Flag was led by Councilperson Deauna.

AGENDA CHANGES

Councilperson Kornbluth motioned to remove resolution to hire Keyboard Clerk I for Fire Prevention office; and to add Resolution #26-218 to appoint Alternate Municipal Court Judge. Councilperson Rivera seconded the motion. All present voting in favor, none opposed.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion by Councilperson Pascual to approve minutes of the June 16, 2026 Regular Public Meeting and the June 16, 2026 Closed Session Minutes (not to be released). Councilperson Rivera seconded the motion. All present voting in favor, none opposed.

VERBAL COMMUNICATIONS I

Council President Almonte opened the meeting and invited the public for comments on agenda items only, limited to five minutes per speaker.

Mary Sullivan, resident, stated that before the Council considers pilot programs, they should speak to the officials in Hackensack. She stated that the developers haven't paid their pilot programs, and the burden has fallen on the taxpayers to make up for the shortfall.

There being no one else who wishes to be heard, Council President Almonte closed Verbal Communications I.

PRESENTATIONS

None.

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS/BOROUGH ENGINEER

A. Engineering & Inspection Status Report

Borough Engineer Tino D' Amore of Remington & Vernick Engineers gave an update on the progress of the 2026 Road Program. The two Borough Hall parking lots are completed, as well as Wildrose

Avenue and Rivera Way. Mr. D'Amore mentioned the ongoing work on Brooks Street, Harcourt Avenue, South and North Queen Streets, and South Demarest. Once the 2026 Road Program is completed, they will begin the NJDOT contract for the Porter Avenue work.

Councilperson Deauna stated that some residents are complaining about the speed humps in town. He further added that they are not uniform and asked if that can be fixed.

Borough Administrator Gallo asked for the names of those roads. Mr. Gallo stated all of the speed humps are designed the same.

Councilperson Pascual stated that Councilperson Deauna was referring to the speed hump by the library on Clinton Avenue near Woodbine going towards Tenafly.

Councilperson Lodato stated that some speed humps seem higher than others. He asked if the engineers go back and measure to ensure they are built to the proper height.

Borough Engineer D' Amore stated that the inspectors will go back when reviewing punch list items.

CORRESPONDENCE

- | | |
|---------------------------|--|
| a.) Ferrer/Resident | RE: Request to Reserve Memorial Park Pavilion for Picnic/Saturday, August 8, 2026/ 12:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. |
| b.) Rugel/Fire Prevention | RE: Resignation Letter |

Motion by Councilperson Kornbluth to accept Correspondence. Councilperson Pascual seconded the motion. All present voting in favor, none opposed.

ORDINANCES

A. Tabled Ordinance

ORDINANCE 26-2668 – AN ORDINANCE TO AUTHORIZE PAYMENT IN LIEU OF TAXES (PILOT) SERVICE CHARGE SCHEDULE – *Tabled 6/16/26*

No action taken.

B. Adoption of Ordinance

Council President Almonte read into the record:

The following ordinance published herewith was first read by title only on Tuesday, June 16, 2026 and posted on the bulletin board of the municipal center.

ORDINANCE 26-2669 – AN ORDINANCE AMENDING CHAPTER 299 OF THE CODE OF THE BOROUGH OF BERGENFIELD, ENTITLED “VEHICLES AND TRAFFIC”

Public Comments on Ordinance 26-2669.

No one came forward.

Motion by Councilperson Pascual, second by Councilperson Deauna, to pass Ordinance 26-2669 on second and final reading and is hereby adopted and notice of same shall be published according to law.

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

Councilperson Lodato:	<i>aye</i>	Councilperson Kornbluth:	<i>aye</i>
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Councilperson Deauna: *aye*
Council President Almonte: *aye*

Councilperson Rivera: *aye*
Councilperson Pascual: *aye*

C. Introduction of Ordinances

Motion by Councilperson Pascual that the following ordinances be introduced and passed on first reading and setting Tuesday, August 18, 2026 at 8:00 p.m. or as soon thereafter as the matter can be heard as the date and time and the Council Chambers of the Bergenfield Borough Hall as the place for a hearing on said ordinance. Seconded by Councilperson Rivera.

Council President Almonte read the title of the ordinance(s) into the record:

ORDINANCE 26-2670 – AN ORDINANCE AMENDING CHAPTER 299 OF THE CODE OF THE BOROUGH OF BERGENFIELD, ENTITLED “VEHICLES AND TRAFFIC”

ORDINANCE 26-2671 - AN ORDINANCE AMENDING AND SUPPLEMENTING CHAPTER 186 OF THE CODE OF THE BOROUGH OF BERGENFIELD, ENTITLED “LAND DEVELOPMENT”

ORDINANCE 26-2672 – AN ORDINANCE AMENDING CHAPTER 186 OF THE CODE OF THE BOROUGH OF BERGENFIELD ENTITLED “LAND DEVELOPMENT”

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

Councilperson Lodato: *aye*
Councilperson Deauna: *aye*
Council President Almonte: *aye*

Councilperson Kornbluth: *aye*
Councilperson Rivera: *aye*
Councilperson Pascual: *aye*

A. CONSENT AGENDA

CONSENT RESOLUTION 26-199. 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) **26-200/**To Approve Bill List
- b) **26-201/**To Approve Liquor License Renewal – Maya Reyan Inc
- c) **26-202/**To Approve the Insertion of a Special Item of Revenue in the 2026 Budget for a Bulletproof Vest Partnership Grant – Chapter 159
- d) **26-203/**To Approve the Insertion of a Special Item of Revenue in the 2026 Budget for Pedestrian Safety Grant – Chapter 159
- e) **26-204/**To Approve Veteran’s Tax Exemption – 73 Murray Hill Terrace
- f) **26-205/**To Approve Veteran’s Tax Exemption – 225 West Main Street
- g) **26-206/**To Approve Veteran’s Tax Exemption – 186 Merritt Avenue
- h) **26-207/**To Approve Veteran’s Tax Exemption – 12 New York Avenue
- i) **26-208/**To Authorize Tax Refund – Exempt Veteran Tax Overpayment – 77 Haring Street
- j) **26-209/**To Authorize the Cancellation of Improvement Assessment and Approve Tax Refund for Fire Damaged Property – 9 Brown Place
- k) **26-210/**To Approve Shared Services Agreement for Special Law Enforcement Office (SLEO) Contract – Bergenfield Board of Education
- l) **26-211/**To Authorize the Submission of the New Jersey Department of Transportation Municipal Aid Application
- m) **26-212/**To Approve an Award to Dutra Excavating & Sewer Inc. for Sewer Line Cleaning and Installation at Vivyen Field

- n) **26-213/**To Approve Change Order No. 2 and Pay Certificate No. 4 & Final – Police Athletic League Field Rain Garden – Puntasecca Contractors Inc.

Motion by Councilperson Pascual to approve the Consent Resolution. Councilperson Rivera seconded the motion.

On a roll call, the vote on the Consent Resolution 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>aye</i>	Councilperson Pascual:	<i>aye</i>

B. RESOLUTIONS

26-214/To Approve Provisional Appointments to the Position of Carpenter/Mason in the Department of Public Works

Motion by Councilperson Deauna, seconded by Councilperson Rivera, that Resolution #26-214 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>aye</i>	Councilperson Pascual:	<i>aye</i>

26-215/To Hire Full – Time Code Enforcement Officer – Anthony Agudelo

Motion by Councilperson Rivera, seconded by Councilperson Pascual, that Resolution #26-215 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>aye</i>	Councilperson Pascual:	<i>aye</i>

26-216/To Hire Crossing Guards for 2026-2027 School Year

Motion by Councilperson Pascual, seconded by Councilperson Deauna, that Resolution #26-216 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>aye</i>	Councilperson Pascual:	<i>aye</i>

26-217/To Hire Part-Time Laborers

Motion by Councilperson Pascual, seconded by Councilperson Rivera, that Resolution #26-217 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>aye</i>	Councilperson Pascual:	<i>aye</i>

26-218/To Appoint Alternate Municipal Court Judge – Jan Meyer, Esq.

Motion by Councilperson Kornbluth, seconded by Councilperson Pascual, that Resolution #26-218 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>aye</i>	Councilperson Pascual:	<i>aye</i>

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None.

NEW BUSINESS

None.

COMMITTEE/DEPARTMENT REPORTS

Motion offered by Council President Almonte that the Committee/Department Reports be spread upon the minutes in full and filed. Councilperson Lodato seconded the motion. All present voting in favor, none opposed.

VERBAL COMMUNICATIONS II

Council President Almonte opened the meeting to Verbal Communications II and invited the public to comment on any subject, limited to five minutes per speaker.

Daria Richards, resident, asked the Council to elaborate on land development in the Borough.

Lidia Janow, resident, expressed concern about the growing populations of geese and deer throughout Bergenfield. She stated that there are geese droppings all over her lawn and down the street where children play, and the deer have eaten all her plants. She has a service that comes once a month, but is a senior on limited income. Ms. Janow stated that the increase of wild life has become a significant issue and urged the Council to consider acting on the matter.

Gerard Caramico, resident, recalled the flooding caused by Hurricane Ida in August 2021, explaining that the Hirschfield Brook overflowed its banks and flooded his basement. He had 42 inches of rainwater in his basement. The entire basement had to be ripped out and redone. Mr. Caramico also expressed concern that weeds have become overgrown to 6ft-7ft in the canal and fears that, without proper maintenance, similar flooding could occur again. Mr. Caramico asked the Council to consider cleaning the brook to help prevent future flooding.

Fred Sahlberg, resident, stated that when talking about the Brook, environmental laws come up. He expressed that at times, you need to disregard environmental laws. Mr. Sahlberg, as VFW trustee, thanked the Council for their continued support and Councilpersons Lodato and Pascual for attending the VFW initiation meeting and supporting the event.

Jacqueline Romney, resident, stated that she sent numerous emails to the Council regarding traffic safety issues on her street, people driving the wrong way, and hasn't received a response. She shared a copy of the emails and Complete Streets policy with officials. Ms. Romney commented

that Mayor Amatorio stated that the information would be reviewed to see if the information would benefit the community, but never followed up. Back in 2023, a representative from EZ Ride reached out to the Borough to offer her assistance on the Complete Streets policy. An invitation for a conference was also shared with everyone, but she is unsure if anyone attended. She communicated with the AI Bot on the website regarding the Traffic Safety Committee, but there is no information regarding meetings or minutes. She is addressing these issues because many bicyclists and pedestrians have been struck in our community. She inquired what efforts is the Council taking to address these issues.

Cherise Infante, resident, inquired the status of her request to host her child's birthday party at Memorial Park. She sent all of the required documents with the application and asked if it can be approved. Ms. Infante also inquired why the public nurse resigned so abruptly. She also stated that there is litter all over town and temporary no parking signs all near Cooper's Pond. Ms. Infante asked where do we go to discuss overdevelopment in town, because she has been turned away from the Planning Board and Zoning Board meetings.

Barry Doll, resident, stated that the geese are overrunning the entire town and down at Cooper's Pond, they look like squatters. He expressed that this might be a health issue. Mr. Doll mentioned that he knows that geese are protected, but if approached as a health issue, there may be some solutions. He mentioned that he picked up a copy of the Fire Department's mid-year report. He expressed it is an excellent report, and suggested that the Council prepare a financial report quarterly or every six months to share how the borough is doing. He also asked what the Council has done to make the town more affordable.

Desiree Paton, resident, stated that with regards to overbuilding, the developers appear to be receiving the majority of the benefits from redevelopment projects. She urged the Council to push back on overdeveloping and advocate on behalf of residents before the State to find a mutually beneficial solution, instead of building on a two-way main street. She suggested refurbishing existing properties along the main street to attract more businesses. She inquired why there isn't some incentives for businesses to come now instead of overdeveloping. Ms. Paton stated that the commercial district is the heart of Bergenfield and its residents, and expressed concerns about increasing traffic, sewer capacity, and school overcrowding. She noted that 50% of new apartments are mandated to accommodate families with children, which she believes will further impact the school system. She also questioned the benefits of the PILOT program. The tax revenue is set aside for the municipality and does not go to the school system. She inquired how that is going to benefit Bergenfield. Ms. Paton added that developers receive density incentives and tax exemptions. The more density, the more profit. She expressed concern that taxpayers could ultimately bear the financial burden if developers fail to meet their obligations, and we do not have a say. She commented that we have a beautiful center of town, let's refurbish it. She inquired whether there are grants available to improve bicycle safety for children and concluded by stating that she has not been permitted to speak at certain meetings.

Mary Sullivan, resident, spoke on wildlife issues. She said the deer and geese population have become excessive, creating safety hazards for residents and drivers. She noted that geese were not a problem when she moved to the area in 1980, but have since become much more prevalent. She also raised concerns about the Hirschfield Brook bushes growing by Bridge Street and Roosevelt Avenue. She understands DPW couldn't get in there to clear it out because the bridge is too low. She stated that it needs to be cleansed because otherwise, it will start to back up and there will be major flooding. She stated there are trees growing in the brook by the New Bridge Farmers Market. Ms. Sullivan thanked Borough Administrator Gallo for finding a new location for the USPS mailbox, the tax box, and the voting box. Ms. Sullivan suggested advertising the new location on the Borough website. She stated the information is not on the website, and the tax office information is out of date.

Sonia Chapman, resident, requested clarification of Resolution #26-215, specifically to elaborate on the responsibilities and duties of the code enforcer and zoning officials. She stated that she attended the Zoning Board meeting, and they expressed they have no authority. Ms. Chapman inquired who holds businesses accountable if there is litter on their properties. She stated specifically mentioned concerns involving the Lidl parking lot, down to the gym, since there is discarded debris all throughout their property and it is disgusting. She is in favor of quality of life citations. She further stated that the car wash across the street from the library is a hazard. There are more children walking on that street going back and forth to school and literally have to walk on the street because the car wash pulls the cars unto the sidewalk to clean and dry the cars and blow the trash onto the street. She would like to know who is responsible to follow up on this.

Angelica Paton, resident, stated that the overdevelopment is contributing to the increase of geese and deer. All of the building is taking their homes away. Ms. Paton expressed her concern about the flooding issue, which is being caused by the ripping up the natural earth and putting up cement, therefore the water has no where to drain. If we stop the overdeveloping, the geese and deer will go back to the woods, and the flooding will stop.

John Smith, resident, stated the comment previously made by a resident about 50% percent set aside for Affordable Housing is incorrect, it's 20%. The set aside for affordable housing is 20%. Mr. Smith stated that people are speaking with regards to overdevelopment, but the State Governor has added more to developments. It is a bill she wants passed. It is not the Mayor and Council, they have to abide by the laws that the Governor pass. Montvale continues to spend money to fight the Governor, and they have lost every case. It is not the Mayor and Council that leads the over development. In terms of the complaints, they need to be made to the Planning Board. Mr. Smith explained that the Planning Board decides the developments. The Borough's planner should be fired. He stated that people are concerned with litter. Down the avenue, all the empty store fronts are plastered with notices of dances. There is an ordinance against that, but no one is enforcing it. He stated that who will be cleaning this up. By the VFW, the McDonald's litter is all down the street. He expressed it is not the store owner's fault, people throw their trash all over the place. He stated that the brook on Clinton Avenue, a landscaper cutting grass on the street, dumped into the brook. He stated that landscapers should be a fee to dump because all they do is blow the leaves into the street, cut the grass, blow things over into the brook, or dump into the pail for the borough to pick-up. No one is enforcing this. He expressed concern about pedestrians and the traffic that continues to increase, and the issues with the car wash on Clinton Avenue. The car wash should be shut down or the Police Department should continue to patrol when cars are lined up. He thanked Councilmembers Lodato and Pascual for attending the VFW event.

There being no one else who wishes to be heard, Council President Almonte closed Verbal Communications II.

Councilperson Kornbluth inquired if anything can be done about the geese and the deer.

Borough Administrator Gallo acknowledged that the geese and deer populations are issues affecting communities throughout Bergen County. However, wildlife is regulated by the County and State. He understands that the deer and geese issue is rampant in town and expressed that he is shocked to see deer in certain areas. He will reach out to the County and State again to seek for guidance. He expressed that he has a meeting with DEP coming up, and will reference the issue to see how it can be addressed.

Borough Attorney Schettino stated the issue is all throughout the County. He stated that some towns have had success with geese management solutions, such as using recordings of barking dogs to discourage geese from gathering, relocating geese to other areas. He stated that some schools also use this to protect school grounds and athletic fields from wildlife damage. There is no solution for the deer problem.

Borough Administrator Gallo stated that when the brook was designed and built many years ago, he doesn't know what equipment they thought could be utilized to clean the brook. He stated that equipment has been modified, they tried using cranes, excavators, to try and clean the brook. He understands that there are weeds and trees growing in there. The borough tried to clean the brook in the past around 2023 or 2024. He will look to address it again. He stated that with regards to Metzler Brook, he has been working with the DEP to try and obtain a permit to repair the walls that have deteriorated, in-kind, to try and improve it. It has taken more than five years and the target keeps moving. He stated that he has a meeting tomorrow to try and resolve this.

Councilperson Pascual confirmed the permit is to have access to clean the brook.

Mr. Gallo confirmed that it has been a battle. He stated that with regards to garbage, it is the property owner, the business owner, that is responsible to clean up. He stated that another individual is needed in Code Enforcement because when they are out doing inspections, they are able to report on other issues such as high grass, garbage, cars parked on grass, etc. The Code Enforcement office will act. We will send more notifications out. He asked that residents send notice to the Building Department. The department will then follow-up and contact the property and business owners. He stated that the idea to renovate the avenue to bring businesses there, is difficult to manage because more and more people shop online, taking away from storefronts. He expressed bringing large marquee storefronts is difficult. He stated that with regards to the comments pertaining to developments taking away from wildlife, 150 South Washington, the parking lot on Church Street near Cooper's Pond that was once a car dealership, and the development for Washington Avenue and Main Street, are all areas that are entirely concrete or asphalt, with no grass. He stated that a field was built on Vivyen Park because it was a bad field and it was improved. The woods and habitats were never impacted. Mr. Gallo further stated that all projects require traffic studies. He stated that the matters Ms. Romney referenced, the speed humps were put in place to slow traffic down and reduce accidents. He further stated that street signs were placed around the school areas, as well as radar traffic lights. Mr. Gallo stated that all traffic issues and complaints should be made to the Police Department. We rely on the Police Department to monitor and manage traffic safety. The borough has been awarded for the same. Mr. Gallo noted that that while traffic accidents are unfortunate and occur in every community, the primary cause of most accidents is human behavior. He explained distracted driving, including texting and failing to pay attention while behind the wheel, continues to be one of the leading contributors to motor vehicle accidents.

Councilperson Kornbluth requested clarification that the 20% set aside for affordable housing is for families with school children.

Borough Attorney Schettino explained even though the PILOT program is not a property tax, it is enforced in the same way. If a property owner fails to make the required PILOT payments, the Tax Collector may place a lien on the property, similar to unpaid property taxes, and may ultimately pursue tax foreclosure if the debt remains unpaid. The same ability the municipality has when a property owner fails to pay their taxes, is the same for when someone fails to make their pilot payment. He read the article in reference to Hackensack and is unsure if the payments were not calculated correctly or the tax collector didn't pursue payment. He further explained that PILOT programs do not have any impact on the school system whatsoever. Mr. Schettino explained that the Board of Education prepares its annual budget based on the amount needed to operate the school system, and that amount is ultimately raised through the municipality property taxes. He stated that schools are not impacted by PILOT programs because they continue to receive the funding they budget for, regardless of whether certain properties are under a PILOT agreement. Borough Attorney Schettino explained that flooding occurs for many reasons and is not solely the result of new construction. He further explained that State and local regulations require developers of larger projects to prepare detailed stormwater management and drainage plans. These plans must be prepared by licensed engineers, reviewed by the municipality's engineer, and demonstrate that the development will not worsen existing drainage conditions. In many cases, the plans are

designed to improve drainage or water flow of the property. He further explained that developers are typically required to install stormwater retention or detention systems, such as seepage pits or underground detention structures, to capture water and slowly release stormwater runoff. These systems reduce the volume and speed of water entering the municipal drainage system during heavy rain events. Most of the older properties were built before such requirements existed and therefore lack comparable stormwater controls. He explained that if you attend a meeting where a plan is presented, you should hear testimony on how it will improve drainage. Mr. Schettino emphasized that all members of the public have the legal right to speak on development applications, whether in support or opposition, and to ask questions regarding testimony presented by applicants and their professionals. If anyone is prevented from commenting or asking questions during the public hearing on an application, that would be improper. He encouraged residents to notify the Borough Administrator, so that the matter can be addressed and everyone's right to participate in the public process can be protected.

Councilperson Kornbluth asked if there is a certain time to ask questions about the projects.

Mr. Schettino explained that the Board Chairman has the discretion to determine when public questions may be asked during a hearing. Some chairs allow questions after each witness testifies, while others prefer to hear all testimony before opening the floor for questions. He explained that regardless of the procedure used, the public has an absolute right, at the conclusion of the application, to comment on the proposal and ask questions related to the testimony presented.

Borough Administrator Gallo further clarified that public comments and questions must occur while the application is actively being heard. If the application is not on the agenda that evening, members of the public cannot comment on it at that meeting.

Mr. Schettino noted that many residents have concerns about increased development and density, but explained that current state and federal housing policies are generally moving in the opposite direction. He added that legislators believe that New Jersey is facing a housing affordability crisis driven by a shortage of available homes. He stated that starter homes five years ago, a starter home would have been valued around \$400,000. Today, the same starter home is valued at \$700,000 and needs work. Mr. Schettino stated that as a result, policies are increasingly designed to encourage additional housing development rather than restrict it. He further illustrated the current housing market and stated that policymakers attribute these rising costs to a lack of housing inventory and that policymakers believe that increasing the supply of housing will help stabilize prices over time. Mr. Schettino also explained that recent legislation has expanded opportunities for residential development by allowing certain single-family homes to be converted into two-family homes under specified circumstances and by permitting religious organizations and certain nonprofit organizations to develop housing on their properties with fewer local approval requirements. He explained that these measures reflect the broader policy objective of increasing the housing supply. Mr. Schettino emphasized that these comments were intended to explain the direction of current state and federal policy, not to express a personal opinion or the official position of the Borough. He added that the purpose was to provide context for why development policies have evolved in recent years. Mr. Schettino noted that many of the largest contributors to affordability, such as grocery prices, healthcare costs, and other economic factors, are beyond the control of municipal governing bodies. Local governments have limited authority over these broader economic issues, even though they significantly affect residents' daily lives. Mr. Schettino stated that the largest factor affecting affordability at the local level is property taxes. He further stated that the governing body only has authority over approximately one-third of your property tax bill. The remaining portion is determined by the county and, more significantly, the local school board. In other words, the governing body controls only about 30% of every property tax dollar. Of that 30%, approximately 95% of the budget consists of fixed costs, leaving only about 5% as discretionary spending. Therefore, when people ask what the governing body can do to make life more affordable, the reality is that many of those issues are beyond the municipality's control. Affordability concerns must be addressed at the state and federal levels.

Mr. Gallo explained with this year's budget, employee health insurance costs increased by approximately \$1.8 million from 2025 to 2026. In addition, the State mandated a \$500,000 increase in pension contributions for the Police Department. He stated, combined, those two increases added roughly \$2.3 million in expenses before the Borough even began preparing the budget. At the same time, the Borough has no simple way to generate an additional \$2.3 million in revenue. Suggestions such as raising fees or writing more traffic tickets are unrealistic, as they would never produce that level of revenue. That is one of the primary reasons why this year's property tax increase is what it is. Mr. Gallo stated that the Borough has worked diligently to control costs and operate more efficiently. He further explained that the number of full-time employees in the Department of Public Works has been reduced, and the Police Department currently operates with fewer officers than in previous years. Despite these reductions, employees continue to work hard to provide services to residents. Mr. Gallo added that the municipal employees started 2026 making less than they did in 2025 because of the increases in health insurance premiums, and employee contributions have outpaced salary increases. That is simply fact. Mr. Gallo stated that the governing body continues to look for responsible ways to strengthen the Borough's financial position. He stated that you have to find means to an end. There are areas in town that need to be fixed because they are deteriorated and bring the town down. He added that the plans have been approached carefully, responsibly, and conservatively. The goal is not to approve every proposed project but to support development that genuinely benefits the community and ultimately strengthens the tax base. He stated that even with the programs, they will generate more revenue on the tax side than we are currently collecting.

Councilperson Pascual asked Mr. Gallo to elaborate on Ordinance 26-2672 regarding land development.

Mr. Gallo explained that the ordinance applies to a specific area of town near the golf course.

Borough Attorney Schettino explained the ordinance modifies minimum lot size requirements in that area. A one-family home required a one-acre lot. Under the proposed ordinance, one-family homes could be built on half-acre lots, and in certain locations, quarter-acre lots, if the area were ever developed. He emphasized that the ordinance simply updates zoning standards for that section of town and positions the Borough more favorably.

Borough Administrator Gallo encouraged residents to contact the municipal office if they had additional questions or wished to discuss any concerns in greater detail.

COUNCIL COMMENTS

Councilperson Lodato stated that he agrees with the expressed concerns and opposition to the developments going on. He thanked all for coming.

Councilperson Deauna wished all a good night and thanked everyone for coming.

Councilperson Kornbluth thanked everyone for coming.

Councilperson Rivera wished all a great night and thanked everyone for coming.

Councilperson Pascual thanked everyone for being here this evening. It was a productive night. They hear their concerns and are going to look into it, especially with the geese, deer and the development. He thanked everyone for coming and wished all a good evening.

Council President Almonte thanked everyone for coming and wished all to have a good night.

CLOSED SESSION

RESOLUTION **26-219**/Authorizing the Governing Body to Enter into Closed Executive Session to discuss:

A. Personnel

1. Police Department Personnel Matters
2. Health Department Personnel Matters
3. Building Department Personnel Matters

Minutes will be taken of the meeting and released to the public at the time that the matter is resolved. After Closed Executive Session, the Mayor and Council will reconvene in the Executive Chambers to adjourn this public meeting.

On a motion by Councilperson Kornbluth, second by Councilperson Rivera, and all present voting in favor, the meeting was adjourned to the Closed Session in the Executive Chambers at 9:22 p.m.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Mayor and Council, on a motion by Councilperson Kornbluth, seconded by Councilperson Pascual, and unanimously carried, the meeting was adjourned at 9:48 p.m.

Marie Quiñones-Wilson
Borough Clerk