Minutes

Mayor and Municipal Council Work Session Meeting
of the Township of Belleville at Council Chambers – Town Hall
152 Washington Avenue, Belleville, New Jersey,
Wednesday, February 11, 2026, at 12:30 p.m.

Call to Order:
By Councilwoman DePeña at 12:31 p.m.

Members Present:
Council Members Vincent Cozzarelli, Naomy DePeña, Thomas Graziano, Tracey J. Muldrow, Frank Velez III, and Mayor Melham

Also Present:
Township Attorney Steven Martino, Township Manager Brian Banda, Police Chief Mark Minichini and Municipal Clerk Jacqueline Guaman

Absent:
Council Member Diana Guardabasco

Pledge of Allegiance:
By Councilwoman DePeña

Sunshine Law:
By Jacqueline Guaman

Pursuant to the requirements of the Open Public Meetings Act (Chapter 231, P.L. 1975) known as the Sunshine Law, notice of this regular meeting was published on Friday, January 9, 2026, edition of the Star Ledger. The Sunshine Law was compiled by adopting and forwarding to the press, posting and filling with the Municipal Clerk the annual resolution showing the date, time, and place of each meeting. A copy of the annual meeting notice has been posted on the Township website and Town Hall Bulletin Board.

Work Session/Council Discussions:
Manager Brian: Redevelopment Attorney Dean Donatelli will be discussing the status of 91 Terry Street and an action proposing introduction at this meeting; will also be discussing the ordinances below associated with the Townships fourth round of Affordable housing obligations due to the approaching State deadline in March.

Councilman Graziano: Some things on the agenda have a vote behind them and as this is a discussion it causes confusion; the already implemented voting on some of these ordinances should be TABLED since this is just a discussion to understand what we are voting for.

Councilwoman DePeña: Let's have the discussion first then at the time of voting you can vote how you see fit once discussion concludes.

Manager Brian: Redevelopment attorney will go over the timelines so Council can vote accordingly.

Dean Donatelli

A. Ordinances to be Introduced

- Discuss the following ordinances for introduction: Ordinances 05-26, 06-26, 07-26 and 08-26.
- An amendment will be made to remove language in paragraphs 12 and 13, incorrectly identifying Belleville as a Township in Morris County.
- The State has set a deadline of March 16 for municipalities to comply with fourth-round affordable housing obligations under the 2024 amendment to the New Jersey Fair Housing Act, requiring towns to provide a realistic opportunity for low- and moderate-income housing.
- The Township is currently in litigation with Fair Share Housing, which has intervened after the Township submitted its affordable housing plans to the court. The goal is to obtain substantive certification for the fourth round (2025–2035), which would protect the Township from potential builder's remedy lawsuits.
- During this period, Belleville must generate 324 rehabilitation units consisting of existing housing units. As part of Region II, these units must be available to income-qualified residents from Essex, Morris, Union, and Warren Counties; however, the Township is exploring options to reserve a percentage for Belleville residents.
- Belleville's Affordable Housing Trust Fund currently has a balance of approximately $5 million, which may be used for programs allowing income-qualified homeowners to receive up to $22,000 for eligible home repairs.
- Yes, this must go to the planning board for approval.
- I spoke with Senator Timberlake and it's the township obligation to make the state do what we, the township, want to do.
- The Planning Board must approve an additional document outlining the Township's prior affordable housing numbers. Some past projects lack Certificates of Occupancy documentation, and the Township is awaiting guidance from Fair Share Housing regarding potential commitments in a court order. The ordinances will be referred to the Planning Board for a master plan consistency review, where the Housing Element and Fair Share Plan will be adopted, and will then return to Council for consideration at the March 24, 2026, meeting.
- It's not urgent, we have more than enough time.
- An ordinance to terminate the redevelopment and financial agreement for the Terry Street project due to an ongoing dispute between the property owners that has delayed completion. We've been working with the developers' attorneys and believe termination is the appropriate step to move the project toward completion.

Questions/Discussions:

Councilman Graziano:

- Doesn't this have to go to the planning board for approval?
- Don't forget there's people at the afternoon meetings and with the council we only have one hour, we all have other jobs. Maybe we should consider moving to a second meeting during the month and have a total discussion about that.

- A special meeting means additional cost to the planning board.
- Yes, the vote is true, but Brian's policy came afterwards for discussion, had I known that my vote would have changed, which is why I said yes, you're right to the vote because we did say yes to afternoon meetings but with an emergency topic to discuss only

Councilwoman DePeña:

- The planning board meeting is back on, no?
- We discussed certain things at Wednesday meetings b/c we have access to the Directors, and then we move forward with voting at the next meeting. That's what I think I recall.
- For the sake of time let's discuss at our next meeting, we do have a lot to get through before our time is up.
- By next meeting can you have something outline about meetings adjustment and what that could look like? Second, we as Council decided to make ourselves available for the work session, but I don't recall us saying it was limited to just one hour.
- You're correct Councilman Graziano, we were under the impression it as only if things were urgent.
- To clarify with the paperwork, we have now will we be able to move forward if we decide to vote today?
- We are ready to move forward so hopefully that clarifies everything. Any other comments or questions from Council?
- This matter may require further discussion, particularly considering recent personnel changes. We should revisit the topic at the next meeting and acknowledge that any changes to the meeting schedule will need to follow proper procedures.
- Thank you. Next item is to discuss the snowplowing plan and answer any questions.

Councilman Cozzarelli:

- Dean and I have been working together to advocate for Belleville residents and veterans just to keep the units in town.
- If we don't do this it leaves room for outside developers to set up shops in Belleville without the township's approval. Suggest Brian to make an internal policy moving forward that outline in detail when and what will be discussed and voted on at meetings.
- If it's an emergency or deadline that's different, but if it's just a general thing then maybe we can try to keep to that format.
- Disagreed that the matter was urgent, noting that the issue has been pending for approximately six months.

Manager Brian:

- We do have a policy, and it has been sent to all the directors as well as something internal the new clerk and I will work out. Problem is the council wants to set the Wednesday meeting as a discussion meeting because then I can organize better otherwise I'm having discussions as they come up.
- I did send the policy out to our internal staff mid-January, we did have a change in Clerk, Dean is not an internal staff, so I would give him a little bit of grace.

Township Attorney Martino:

- With the new Clerk and Manager, we have been working to set up a policy for our meetings to run smoothly, with that said we must understand emergencies do come up or short notice

Councilman Velez:

- Daytime meetings were originally intended for discussion only, with matters to be addressed at the regular Council meeting at the end of the month. It was noted that daytime meetings have occurred over the past two months, and while they may be appropriate for emergencies, holding them regularly may not be necessary. A suggestion was made to consider returning to the previous practice of holding a second Tuesday evening Council meeting, which had been used effectively in the past.

Manager Brian: Director Robert Welter couldn't be here, so Mr. Smitty is here to give a report on his behalf. Smitty's been overseeing the crew so he can give a report on what DPW has been up to and answer any questions Council or the public may have.

Robert Welter, DPW --- Supervisor Charlie Smitty gave Report

A. Discussion of snow plowing plans

- Belleville received 12 inches of snow on 1/25/26 During the storm, DPW plowed and salted all municipal streets, parking lots, and Township-owned properties. Due to the significant accumulation, extended post-storm cleanup operations were required, with priority given to public safety areas.
- Initial efforts focused on clearing handicapped parking spaces and bus shelters to ensure accessibility for residents using public transportation, followed by street-level snow removal. DPW then addressed snow emergency streets, opening them curb-to-curb to improve traffic flow and allow emergency vehicle access.
- Most emergency streets have been completed, with Mill Street expected to be finished by the end of the week**.** Crews are now addressing select streets where snow buildup restricts two-way traffic to improve pass ability and safety. Due to the volume of snow, full curb-to-curb removal on every street is not feasible; the focus remains on maintaining safe and passable roadways.
- DPW has also begun clearing catch basins on Main Street and Washington Avenue to assist with drainage and reduce the risk of localized flooding as temperatures are expected to rise above freezing. Snow removal operations will continue on select streets, and resident requests will be reviewed and prioritized based on safety and accessibility needs.
- I would have to investigate that, but DPW will formulate a plan.

Questions/Discussions:

Councilwoman DePeña:

- Thank you DPW for your response to the significant snowstorm and their duty to maintain public safety, questions Council?

Manager Brian:

- Thanked DPW for their work and noted that many residents may not realize the effort required to keep township roads safe and passable.
- Do we have options on how to remove the snow we have stored in the township's parking lots?

Councilman Velez:

- Thanked DPW and suggested prioritizing streets near schools in the future due to heavy traffic during student drop-off and pick-up times.

Councilwoman DePeña: Next item of business is a report from Police Chief Minichini to discuss Ordinance 09-26 being introduced.

Manager Brian: The Township has not yet received cost estimates for renovations to the police station. Regarding the new station on Belmont, the Police Chief is taking a proactive approach toward activating the facility and will discuss the overall objectives outlined in the write-up that was provided to Council via email prior to the meeting. It was also noted that if any changes to the proposed ordinance are needed, amendments can be made.

Police Chief, Mark Minichini

A. Discussion of Ordinance #09-26 being introduced

- Discussion was held regarding 191 Belmont Avenue, the new police precinct. While there have been some initial challenges, the Police Department, with input from Township Manager Brian Banda, is working to move forward with activating the program.
- It was noted that the Silver Lake area has historically served as a second downtown for Belleville, but community conditions have changed over time. The proposed ordinance would allow for the operation and staffing of the Silver Lake precinct to help improve quality of life, address homelessness concerns, and reduce incidents such as auto burglaries. Implementation would require a Table of Organization.
- The importance of community engagement was also emphasized, noting that input from Silver Lake residents through community meetings will help the Township identify issues and guide efforts to improve conditions in the area.
- As far as timeline it will be implemented in stages. While the Township has previously coordinated with Newark and Bloomfield on a temporary basis, the goal moving forward is for Belleville to operate the initiative independently due to the manpower and financial investment already made. It was emphasized that proper staffing is necessary to ensure the precinct operates effectively without impacting police services in other parts of the Township.
- All precincts serve warrants so yes Silver Lake will be able to help with that; the only change in this ordinance is appointing 1 commander to the TO, whose job will be to command and staff the new precinct accordingly.
- An estimated $65,000 increase to the police budget for this project was reported. A discussion was held with the CFO, and it is not expected to pose any budgetary issues.
- This is a hybrid of community policing and community involvement alongside the officers staffed at Silver Lake precinct.
- The cost has nothing to do with proposed ordinance #09-26.

Questions/Comments:

Councilwoman DePeña:

- Is there a timeline Council can look at to understand each phase in which the project will progress? Is there a collaboration with Newark or Bloomfield since they police the neighboring area as well?
- To clarify we're not voting on any approval of budget, we're just moving forward with the plans.

- I would request that more concrete cost estimates be presented at the next meeting. It was also suggested that discussions with Newark should continue, given the city's proximity to the area and its potential role in supporting efforts to revitalize the neighborhood.

Councilman Cozzarelli:

- Will this precinct be able to help serve warrants by helping the township police department with the workload? Can you explain the changes of the TO?
- Is this like the Street Crimes Units? Is staffing going to be an issue?

Councilman Graziano:

- Can we workshop this more to come up with what the budget will look like for this project instead of voting on it today? Council hasn't seen the budget yet, so we need to see where these funds come from.
- Manager Brian idea about more discussion before first reading was a great suggestion and something we should do going forward.

Manager Brian:

- The budget committee can meet with the Chief to go over the numbers before the next Council meeting, so Council can feel more at ease.

Councilman Velez:

- Great proposal, I would like to see more of the budget to fund projects going forward before the Wednesday meeting.

Councilwoman DePeña:

- Thank you, Police Chief Minichini next item of business will be a report from the Manager.

Report of the Township Manager - Brian Banda

- The floors at the Friendly House were finally put in and they look great. How does Council feel about a township insignia or Buccaneer on the center of the court?
- Council has agreed to go with the Township insignia in response to Manager Brian's question.

Report of the Mayor:

Mayor Melham not here at this time, Councilwoman DePeña will give report

- February 20, 2026; Dominican Flag Raising at 12pm open to the public.
- Councilwoman DePeña will be working in conjunction with Senator Timberlake and Councilwoman Guardabasco to host a community baby shower event in honor of Councilwoman Muldrow who will be having her first set of twins as well as Senator Timberlake whose having her fourth child.

Communications:

Jacqueline Guaman

- None to report

Ordinances for Introduction:

ORDINANCE #05-26 AN ORDINANCE OF THE TOWNSHIP OF BELLEVILLE AUTHORIZING AND APPROVING THE TERMINATION OF THE

REDEVELOPMENT AGREEMENT AND THE FINANCIAL AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE TOWNSHIP OF BELLEVILLE AND 91 TERRY STREET
Motion by Councilman Cozzarelli; Seconded by Councilman Velez.
Ayes: Cozzarelli, DePeña, Graziano, Muldrow, Velez, and Mayor Melham
Nays: None Absent: Guardabasco Abstain: None Motion Carries

ORDINANCE #06-26 ORDINANCE OF THE TOWNSHIP OF BELLEVILLE APPROVING AMENDMENTS TO DEVELOPMENT FEE REGULATIONS OF THE AFFORDABLE HOUSING ORDINANCE OF THE TOWNSHIP OF BELLEVILLE IN ACORDANCE WITH THE TOWNSHIP'S FOURTH ROUND AFFORDABLE HOUSING OBLIGATIONS
Motion by Councilman Cozzarelli; Seconded by Councilman Velez.
Ayes: Cozzarelli, DePeña, Graziano, Muldrow, Velez, and Mayor Melham
Nays: None Absent: Guardabasco Abstain: None Motion Carries

ORDINANCE #07-26 ORDINANCE OF THE TOWNSHIP OF BELLEVILLE APPROVING AMENDMENTS TO MUNICIPAL HOUSING LIAISON AND ADMINISTRATIVE AGENT PROVISIONS OF THE AFFORDABLE HOUSING ORDINANCE OF THE TOWNSHIP OF BELLEVILLE IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE TOWNSHIP'S FOURTH ROUND AFFORDABLE HOUSING OBLIGATIONS
Motion by Councilman Cozzarelli; Seconded by Councilman Velez.
Ayes: Cozzarelli, DePeña, Graziano, Muldrow, Velez, and Mayor Melham
Nays: None Absent: Guardabasco Abstain: None Motion Carries

ORDINANCE #08-26 AN ORDINANCE OF THE TOWNSHIP OF BELLEVILLE IMPLEMENTING A REHABILITATION PROGRAM IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE TOWNSHIP'S FOURTH ROUND AFFORDABLE HOUSING OBLIGATIONS
Motion by Councilman Cozzarelli; Seconded by Councilman Velez.
Ayes: Cozzarelli, DePeña, Graziano, Muldrow, Velez, and Mayor Melham
Nays: None Absent: Guardabasco Abstain: None Motion Carries

ORDINANCE #09-26 AN ORDINANCE AMENDING CHAPTER 2-ADMINISTRATION OF THE TOWNSHIP OF BELLEVILLE CODE
Motion by Councilman Cozzarelli; Seconded by Councilman Velez.
Ayes: Cozzarelli, DePeña, Graziano, Muldrow, Velez, and Mayor Melham
Nays: None Absent: Guardabasco Abstain: None Motion Carries

Public Comments:
Motion to Open Public Comments by Councilman Cozzarelli; Seconded by Councilman Velez.
Ayes: Cozzarelli, DePeña, Graziano, Muldrow, Velez, and Mayor Melham
Nays: None Absent: Guardabasco Abstain: None Motion Carries

Mario Drozs – 95 Bell Street; would the rental units be single or multifamily units? Would the rent be fixed or market rate? Who pays for the repairs?

Vincent Frantantoni – 129 Mount Prospect Ave; the sound system is great, and DPW did an excellent job with snow removal. However, non-resident vehicles are taking up parking on my

street. Many housing ordinances seem to favor developers, and we should do more to prioritize our community.

Gary Hinton – 307 Fairway Avenue; DPW did a great job within the town, if they can just clean the area on Belleville Ave and franklin Ave near the turn on a two-lane street way merging into one due to the snow that'll be great. Second, bridge brook apartments are dumping their snow in the river. Third, when I put in OPRA requests I'm getting unsatisfactory responses which make it seem like the township is hiding something.

Peter Caggiano – 60 Heckel Street; representative of Belleville Unico and would ask Council to waive the fee for the use of the senior recreation center for our once-a-year pocketbook bingo fundraiser we have coming up on 3/26/26.

Motion to Close Public Comments by Councilman Cozzarelli; Seconded by Councilman Velez.
Ayes: Cozzarelli, DePeña, Graziano, Muldrow, Velez, and Mayor Melham
Nays: None Absent: Guardabasco Abstain: None Motion Carries

Ordinances for Public Hearing:
Jacqueline Guaman

- None to report

Resolutions:
Motion to Approve Consent Agenda by Councilman Cozzarelli; Seconded by Councilman Velez.
Ayes: Cozzarelli, DePeña, Graziano, Muldrow, Velez, and Mayor Melham
Nays: None Absent: Guardabasco Abstain: None Motion Carries

RESOLUTION #77-2026 RESOLUTION TO APPROVE TAX OVERPAYMENT
Motion by Councilman Cozzarelli; Seconded by Councilman Velez.
Ayes: Cozzarelli, DePeña, Graziano, Muldrow, and Mayor Melham
Nays: None Absent: Guardabasco Abstain: None Motion Carries

RESOLUTION #78-2026 RESOLUTION OF THE TOWNSHIP OF BELLEVILLE, COUNTY OF ESSEX, ENGAGING AN ADMINISTRATIVE AGENT PURSUANT TO THE FAIR HOUSING ACT, AS AMENDED
Motion by Councilman Cozzarelli; Seconded by Councilman Velez.
Ayes: Cozzarelli, DePeña, Graziano, Muldrow, and Mayor Melham
Nays: None Absent: Guardabasco Abstain: None Motion Carries

RESOLUTION #79-2026 RESOLUTION OF THE TOWNSHIP OF BELLEVILLE, COUNTY OF ESSEX, ADOPTING AN OPERATING MANUAL FOR THE ADMINISTRATION OF RENTAL AND FOR-SALE UNITS UNDER THE TOWNSHIP'S REHABILITATION/HOME IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM
Motion by Councilman Cozzarelli; Seconded by Councilman Velez.
Ayes: Cozzarelli, DePeña, Graziano, Muldrow, and Mayor Melham
Nays: None Absent: Guardabasco Abstain: None Motion Carries

New Business:
Councilman Cozzarelli: free rabies clinic hosted by the Belleville Health Department on March 7, 2026, at the Firehouse from 9am-12pm, as well as dog/cat license renewals available to purchase. Also, congratulations and good luck to the Township's new Clerk and her clerk staff Atiyyah Hall.

Motion to Adjourn (1:37pm) by Councilman Velez; Seconded by Councilman Cozzarelli. All-In-Favor

Respectfully Submitted,

Jacqueline Guaman, R.M.C.
Township Clerk

The next Regular Council Meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, February 24, 2026 at 6:00pm.