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, July 8, 2026, at 12:30 p.m.

Call to Order:
By Mayor Velez at 12:30pm

Members Present:
Council Members Cozzarelli, Graziano, Guardabasco, Rodriguez, and Mayor Velez

Present by Phone:
Deputy Mayor Muldrow and Council Member Wells (late, 12:40pm)

Also Present:
Township Attorney Mark DiPisia, Township Manager Brian Banda, Police Chief Mark Minichini, Chief Financial Officer, Frank DiMaria and Municipal Clerk Jacqueline Guaman

Pledge of Allegiance:
By Mayor Velez

Sunshine Law:
By Clerk 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 meeting was published in the January 9, 2026, Star Ledger. An annual meeting notice resolution was adopted, forwarded to the press, posted, and filed with the Municipal Clerk, establishing the date, time, and place of all meetings. A copy of the annual meeting notice has been posted on the Township website and Town Hall Bulletin Board.

Work Session/Council Discussions:
Chief Financial Officer - Frank DiMaria

A. Discussion of Proposed 2026 Budget

- This budget includes a capital budget and an operating budget, both two separate and distinct things.
- Discussion takes place with each department to go over capital and operating expenses, then the Manager decides how much he will allocate to each department.
- Trenton reviews the budget during the time from after the budget was introduced to when it will possibly be adopted, roughly 28 days later, if changes need to be made it will be done during that timeframe which means the budget will be amended.
- Capital budget – (2 parts) 1. 6-year capital improvement plan to lay out basic overall needs i.e., sanitary, sewer, water, streets and facilities.

- These improvements were put out at the beginning of the year and thus make up the numbers in your budget for capital expenses only.
- Yes, those numbers are included in the budget.
- Operating budget – (2) water utility and a current fund; water utility refers to as self-liquidating which means you generate enough cash in that calendar year to support your budgeted expense (planned expenses).
- Two biggest water utility projects – (1) lead line replacement program, 5-million-dollar allocation over a 6-year period ending in 2030 and (2) meter replacement program, $600,000 yearly for the next 5 years.
- Utility capital and general capital runs sidebar to your operating budget, therefore you can introduce anywhere between January and December.
- Water, utility and current funds are all set up and will be allocated to each department, the legwork is complete so that's what is being introduced in the budget.
- During the temporary budget period was the Cortlandt street fire and the town had to establish an appropriation to spend against, so in that case this resulted in an emergency temporary budget.
- The town has no clear assessment on the damage surrounding Cortlandt.
- Serious infrastructure damage will cost the town a lot of money, so far, we're north of half a million in.
- We've secured a grant for reimbursement for water, equipment and overtime – roughly $430,000 back.
- So, the half a million dollars can be offset by this grant, which impact on the taxpayer will be minimal.
- The infrastructure damage caused by the fire will have to be paid for via capital ordinance later. The current budget cannot afford to withstand such costs.
- Since this property was assessed 10/2025, for 2026 the town will receive the full taxes, however in 2027 due to the value after the fire, were looking at a $300,000 shortfall in property taxes.
- $300,000 = 1 tax point; the taxpayers will pay an additional tax point for the loss of those buildings if the town doesn't figure out a way to pay for the damage.
- Current fund budget is roughly at a $175 increase on the average assessment.
- Net evaluations are up this year, by 2027 we will see a significant decrease due to the loss of value of those 3 properties.
- There's been no change in the budget regarding the contracts that expired 12/31/2025; no new or expanded programs other than in the police table organization and services.
- The biggest increase in the budget is the group insurance ($4 million increase) since premium rates are high and the most significant are the health claims.
- No significant personnel change, no raises are in this budget.

- To take on new projects, you'll need to increase revenue or reduce costs – the current budget can't support them.
- No, it's a little north of 300.
- There's no room for reductions; this is what the town costs.
- The solution would be to look for additional revenue sources.
- The Rev is paying dividends now, from an $100,000 annual service charge to north of one million dollars in one year.
- They climbed to $700,000+ in 2026 and they'll be well over a million the following year.
- The others are stabilized; the payoff comes after the audit, once the final numbers are calculated and the administrative charge is applied- that's when it bears fruit.
- Essex is still in the works; Ecos Kelsey is paying full taxes, Silverlake Village this year went from $620,000 to $716,000.
- For abatements, year 3 is usually when it hits.

Manager Brian:

- This discussion is to introduce the budget for the 2026 calendar year because we have a deadline to introduce by 7/17/26 and Mr. DiMaria will explain the budget process and major changes in certain line items that were impacted.
- Capital budget balances out with the operating budget because capital spending turns into debt service and debt service goes into your operating budget.
- With capital projects, when you invest you take on new debt while paying off old debt; debt service fluctuates.
- Group insurance has been an issue for years; the funds eat away at our budget.
- Downtown and urban areas should cover most of the cost for suburban taxpayers, so focus on maximizing areas like Silverlake and Washington Ave in the Valley.
- They're paying full taxes, is that a 5-year abatement?
- Terry street is still coming along; they are under pilot still.

Councilman Graziano:

- Grants we have already received sometimes require us to meet specific grant needs, are those numbers included in the capital budget for 2026 as well as the projects that need capital?
- We need to allocate those approximate dollars in 2027?
- The damage from the fire is not accounted for in this 2026 budget?
- Do we lose revenue on the building?
- So, will the taxpayer see a $175 uptick on the average home?
- To keep taxes low what can be reduced?
- When are we going to see the fruits from the prior developments?
- What about the other developments?

Mayor Velez:

- Can you give this specific budget timeline for council and the public as to when this process starts and why it's now being introduced?
- Regarding additional revenue, I've been working with Congresswoman Mejia, Senator Booker and Kim to secure federal funding for Belleville.

Councilwoman Guardabasco:

- The business on the other side of Shoprite, Ecos Kelsey, what's the status?

Report of the Manager:

Manager Brian:

- None

Discussion:

A. Garbage Collection – Mayor Velez

- There's been several complaints from residents, and garbage not being picked up for weeks. What corrective action has been taken to address the issue?

Manager Brian:

- The heat wave set operations back - health hazard - staff were sent home early on the township and garbage company side.
- Were in a one-year extension contract with the garbage company until we go out for bid.
- Aside from this heat wave, there were other issues that arose with this company, DPW Welter will stay in close contact with the garbage company.
- Next contract we will negotiate delays and service.

B. Daytime Meetings – Mayor Velez

- Speaking with council and everyone's convenience, it is time to move away from daytime meetings.
- Mario when you were on the Council how did it work?
- Is that legal? Can we do that?
- Action Item – going forward Manager and Madam Clerk can we cancel the remaining daytime meetings for the rest of the year?
- Cancel the remaining daytime meetings, discuss new dates for the second meeting, if an emergency special meeting comes up, we advertise it.
- We should discuss first the dates that works best for Council, I will speak with the Clerk once I have confirmed the dates and we go from there.

Councilman Graziano:

- Is it possible to have a council-only discussion prior to a regular council meeting since many of us don't get the opportunity to discuss amongst each other before the public?
- What about matters that we need to discuss privately?
- I do like the two regular meetings per month.
- Do we put a resolution on the table to add a second meeting per month, one being a discussion meeting, and we start that August-September?

- So, do we do that now to put a resolution on the table with the correct dates?

Attorney DiPisia:

- Councilman, do you mean an executive/closed session or a work session prior to a regular council meeting?
- A lot of municipalities will have a work session prior to a regular meeting.
- A work session is a public meeting, it's open to the public, it can be done anywhere if properly advertised – that's allowed if Council wish.
- There's no open discussion, that would be a closed or executive session.
- Council can amend the agenda to move executive session to the beginning of the meeting; you'd still need to open a public meeting first.
- If meetings are properly advertised within 48-hour notice.
- Mayor, just to clarify, are we cancelling the daytime meetings or are we moving the time to a nighttime meeting?
- There must be a resolution, we need to properly advertise those meetings.

Mario Drodz – 95 Bell Street

- Two meetings a month, public meeting started at 7:00pm; executive meeting once a month at 6:00pm prior to the 7:00pm meeting.
- Budget meetings were held on Saturday, with department heads present and open to the public.

Clerk Guaman:

- For the record we are cancelling all future Wednesday meetings and as needed we will add an evening meeting.
- In the past we would have the meetings on the second and fourth Tuesday of each month.

Report of the Mayor:

- Discussions with Congresswoman Aaliyah Mejia, Senator Cory Booker and Eddie Kim about federal funding for various projects in Belleville.
- Ceremony of Council swearing in hosted by the Board of Education on July 1st went smoothly, thank you for allowing us to utilize the space.
- Budget Committee met July 1st.
- Thank you to our first responders at Friday's firework display who kept everyone safe after the terrible storm.

Motion from the Floor to cancel all future Wednesday Work Session Meetings at 12:30pm by Councilman Graziano; Seconded by Councilwoman Guardabasco.
Ayes: Cozzarelli, Graziano, Guardabasco, Muldrow, Rodriguez, Wells and Mayor Velez.
Nays: None Absent: None Abstain: None Motion Carries

Motion from the Floor to appoint Mario Drodz, 95 Bell Street, for the Class IV seat on the planning board by Councilwoman Guardabasco; Seconded by Councilwoman Rodriguez.

Ayes: Cozzarelli, Graziano, Guardabasco, Muldrow, Rodriguez, Wells and Mayor Velez.
Nays: None Absent: None Abstain: None Motion Carries

Motion from the Floor to appoint Alterio Jerry Delguercio, 8 Grove Street, for the Alternate seat on the planning board by Councilwoman Rodriguez; Seconded by Councilwoman Guardabasco.
Ayes: Cozzarelli, Graziano, Guardabasco, Muldrow, Rodriguez, Wells and Mayor Velez.
Nays: None Absent: None Abstain: None Motion Carries

Motion from the Floor to appoint Christopher Kossup, 85 Routan Road, for the Alternate seat on the zoning board by Councilwoman Rodriguez; Seconded by Councilwoman Guardabasco.
Ayes: Cozzarelli, Graziano, Guardabasco, Muldrow, Rodriguez, Wells and Mayor Velez.
Nays: None Absent: None Abstain: None Motion Carries

Approval of Minutes:

Clerk Guaman:

- December 16, 2025, Pending (David Arce)
- We received it, but they have to be amended by the prior Deputy Clerk.
- The review is done; I'll give it to you after the meeting.

Mayor Velez:

- New Council Members who were not present at this time will have to abstain their vote.
- Are the minutes ready?
- Do we have a timeline? Will they be ready at the next meeting?

Manager Brian:

- That's at the discretion of the Clerk. If you give me your review I can give it to him to get it repaired.

Communications:

Clerk Guaman

- Special Meeting on Tuesday, 7/14/26 at 6:00pm to introduce the 2026 Municipal budget.

Public Comments:

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

Attorney DiPisia:

- Public comments are limited to five minutes and are not a question-and-answer period for the Mayor and Council. Please state your name and address for the record.

Vincent Frantantoni – 129 Mt. Prospect Ave.

- Local Finance Board extended the budget introduction deadline to March 31st and the adoption deadline to April 30th.
- Process of the budget should've been happening at the last quarter of last year.
- New council have never been to a meeting and have no clue what's going on.
- Hold your employees accountable to get municipal business done on time.

CFO DiMaria:

- A temporary budget has been approved; an emergency resolution was passed.
- The 3 elections we've had this year have played a part in the delay of the budget; however, you cannot introduce or adopt a budget by different governing bodies.
- The state was made aware of this entire process.

Mario Drodz – 95 Bell Street

- To what extent is the town getting reimbursed by the insurance company or how much insurance did the two owners have?
- The owner with no insurance, is it possible that when they get a COO there should be a condition that they are insured?

CFO DiMaria:

- The owner with insurance for 2 parcels pays 2/3rd of the claim and the town pay for the remaining 1/3rd.
- The town hired the contractor; we have to pay for that. Total $450,000
- The uninsured property was ordered demolished by the Construction Department. The town covered the $150,000 cost and placed a lien on the property for reimbursement.
- The infrastructure portion is for a later date; we can handle through capital which will impact everyone.

Jerry Delguercio – 8 Grove Street

- The Council should be aware of current litigation involving the town.

Attorney DiPisia:

- As a member of the planning and zoning board, exercise cautions regarding pending litigation.

Michael Sheldon – 47 Floyd Street

- The special meeting 7/14/26 is just for introduction not adoption, correct?
- Discusses the prior Councils and the current/previous administration repeated failure to introduce the budget on time.

Arlene Schor – 75 Rossmore Pl.

- Recommend Council authorize grant applications ahead of submission deadlines to avoid last-minute delays.

- When there's an interest in applying for a grant, the grant committee needs to know what the prerequisites are.
- When is the schedule of trainings for the planning and zoning board?

Carol Bradley – Naples Avenue, Silverlake area

- Address the quality of life in Silverlake.
- Wednesday mornings are constantly street sweeping, and trash is left all over the street.
- Several cars belong to one household taking up space. How can the town address this?

Manager Brian:

- If the health department is unable to handle the issue, give my office a call.
- Send me an email with your name, phone number and address.

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

Executive Session:

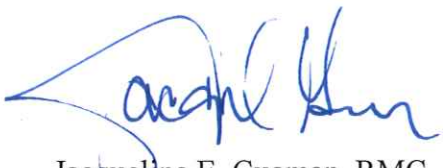
Motion to Enter Executive Session for litigation, personnel and contract negotiations by Councilwoman Guardabasco; Seconded by Councilman Graziano.
Ayes: Cozzarelli, Graziano, Guardabasco, Muldrow, Rodriguez, Wells and Mayor Velez.
Nays: None Absent: None Abstain: None Motion Carries

Motion to Exit Executive Session by Councilwoman Guardabasco; Seconded by Councilman Graziano.
Ayes: Cozzarelli, Graziano, Guardabasco, Muldrow, Rodriguez, Wells and Mayor Velez.
Nays: None Absent: None Abstain: None Motion Carries

Adjournment:

Motion to Adjourn at 2:54pm by Councilman Cozzarelli; Seconded by Councilwoman Guardabasco. All-In-Favor

Respectfully Submitted,



Jacqueline E. Guaman, RMC
Township Clerk

The next Special Meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, July 14, 2026, at 6:00pm.