

**MAYOR AND COUNCIL
BOROUGH OF DEMAREST
WORK SESSION Minutes
January 12, 2026
7:30 PM**

The notice requirements of the Open Public Meetings Act of the State of New Jersey, P.L. 1975, Chapter 231, have been satisfied by the inclusion of the date, time and place of this meeting in the annual schedule of meetings of this Governing Body. Such schedule of meetings was published as required by law and is posted at Borough Hall, on the Borough website and filed in the office of the Borough Clerk.

Pledge of Allegiance

Roll Call:

Present: Mayor Bernstein, Council President Slowikowski, Councilmember Carmeli, Councilmember Collins, Councilmember Fox, Councilmember Marks, Councilmember Reiss

Absent:

Also Present: Julie Falkenstern, Borough Administrator
Deena Rosendahl, Borough Attorney
Nick Chelius, Borough Engineer
John McLoughlin, Fire Chief

ORDINANCE (INTRODUCTION): (none)

ORDINANCE PUBLIC HEARING (ADOPTION): (none)

Work Session Discussion Items:

Engineering Report

Mr. Chelius reviewed the monthly engineering report noting that it is brief as 2026 projects are being discussed and paving schedules being finalized. He gave a timeline of the compost facility project that was awarded in December.

Downtown Redevelopment-Former Bank Building

Council President Slowikowski gave the following update:

First, I just want to thank former councilman and Economic Development Chair David Jiang for his countless hours of work over the past 2 years to get us to where we are today. On any of the committee's in which we serve, it's the Chair that takes the lead for that specific committee and

becomes the point communicator with all parties involved, and basically shoulders the majority of the work, so this really has been “his baby” and I am honored to take over as the Chair and continue down the path he has laid out for all of us up until this point.

I just wanted to take a minute to step back and remind the council and the public how and why we got to this point in the first place. When the Economic Development committee was formed in January of 2024, we had the task of furthering the Borough’s goal of strengthening and revitalizing our downtown. In 2024 the borough designated our commercial center as an “area in need of redevelopment” under the NJ’s Local Redevelopment and Housing Law. This was based upon a Planning Board hearing regarding the condition of the downtown (dilapidated buildings, vacant storefronts, poor designs). This designation allows the Borough to adopt a Plan permitting mixed-use developments to further the potential for significant growth. It also allows for economic incentives necessary to attract competent redevelopers whose vision is consistent with the borough’s. Any financial incentive needs to also have a material benefit of course to the borough as well.

Regarding specifically 129 Hardenburg/the bank building, I’ve gotten a crash course in the last week or so with what I am legally allowed and not allowed to share with the public regarding the specifics of any of our talks with potential developers. But what I can share is the following:

- The committee is recommending a mixed-use building – retail on the ground floor and residential units on the second and third floor.*
- The borough obtained an appraisal in October 2025, and the property value is \$1.4M for mixed-use development.*
- Any developer would have to pay a price consistent with this appraised value.*
- The project will contain required affordable housing units which will help the borough meet its state mandated affordable housing obligations/requirements.*
- Sufficient parking will be required.*

The next step is for the Economic Development Committee to make a recommendation to the Council, and then the Council will vote to designate a redeveloper. And we take it from there. This is a process and the Council needs to take this one step at a time. The public will be informed as each step is taken. I’m excited for the year ahead and look forward to the revitalization of our downtown!

Consent Agenda

Mayor Bernstein asks if any member would like to have any resolution removed from the consent agenda and voted on separately. (none)

Mayor Bernstein asks if any member would like to abstain from voting on any resolution on the consent agenda. (none)

Mayor Bernstein asks for a motion to accept the consent agenda (with any abstentions noted)

Consent Agenda:

Resolution No. 032-26	Appointment of Labor Counsel for 2026
Resolution No. 033-26	Finance Department Salaries
Resolution No. 034-26	Mutual Aid and Rapid Deployment
Resolution No. 035-26	Return of Escrow
Resolution No. 036-26	Capital Purchase – Public Works
Resolution No. 037-26	Capital Purchase – Police Department

A motion was made by Councilmember Collins and seconded by Councilmember Fox.

ROLL CALL:

Ayes: Council President Slowikowski, Councilmember Carmeli, Councilmember Collins, Councilmember Fox, Councilmember Marks, Councilmember Reiss
Nays: None

Approval of Minutes:

January 5, 2026 Sine Die and Reorganization Meetings

A motion was made by Council President Slowikowski and seconded by Councilmember Reiss.

ROLL CALL:

Ayes: Council President Slowikowski, Councilmember Carmeli, Councilmember Collins, Councilmember Fox, Councilmember Marks, Councilmember Reiss
Nays: None

Meeting Open to the Public

Councilmember Fox made a motion to open the meeting to the public. The motion was seconded by Councilmember Collins and approved by all on a voice vote.

Mike Clarke

Mr. Clarke asked for confirmation that the intent of the Council is to sell the bank building. The Mayor confirmed that the Borough intends to sell the building as part of a redevelopment. He commented that he did not think that the time of the Reorganization meeting allowed many residents to attend. He then asked if any new buildings were proposed as part of the restaurant use at the Train Station. He was told that an outdoor refrigerator is proposed but there is no building.

Jeanne Nonnemacher

Ms. Nonnemacher stated that she was disturbed by the SWAT team training exercise that was done on her street on 1/7. She asked why the public wasn't informed so that

they were aware it was training exercise. Mayor Bernstein said he didn't all the details, but he would speak to the Chief of Police and ask that notice is given in the future when appropriate. Ms. Nonnenmacher then asked if the council knew the number of units proposed for the redevelopment. Council President Slowikowski said that she couldn't answer that until the designation of a redeveloper was done. She also asked if the bank was purchased with Affordable Housing Trust Funds. Mayor Bernstein noted that the transaction occurred before his administration, but answered that the Borough initially used trust funds for the purchase, the funds were returned to the Affordable Housing Trust when all affordable housing project was moved to 127 Hardenburgh.

Ray Cywinski

Mr. Cywinski asked if the Affordable Trust Fund was appropriately refunded and documented with the State. Ms. Falkenstern answered that the Borough's Affordable Housing Planner is tasked with accounting of the trust fund and preparing a spending plan so she would have made that report. Mr. Cywinski also noted that he believed the Reorganization Meeting was held at an inconvenient time for residents. He noted that the room was full at the beginning of the meeting, but many people left after the swearing in of the Police Chief and Deputy. Mr. Cywinski then asked about the size of the outdoor refrigerator at the train station and asked if any trees around the train station would be affected by building or landscaping. Mayor Bernstein answered that it was too early to answer since the Borough doesn't have a proposed plan from the lease holder yet. He also believes parking will be an issue.

Mike Clarke

Mr. Clarke stated that he believes deposits from the Woodlands project were made to the affordable housing trust and that it is related to the issue of how the funds were accounted. Councilmember Fox said that while Woodlands was required to deposit a large sum in the fund it is unrelated to the bank building purchase or accounting of the fund.

Mr. Cywinski asked what the balance was in the trust fund. Ms. Falkenstern said she believes it is just under \$4M, but that he should call the finance office for an accurate number.

Councilmember Fox then made a motion to close the meeting to the public. The motion was seconded by Councilmember Collins and approved by all on a voice vote.

Closed Session Resolution 2026-001

WHEREAS, N.J.S.A. 10:4-12 provides for a Public Body to go into a Closed Session during a Public Meeting; and

WHEREAS, the Governing Body of the Borough of Demarest has deemed it necessary to go into closed session to discuss matters which are exempted from the public.

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, by the Borough of Demarest that the Governing Body shall go into closed session on January 12, 2026, for the following reasons as outlined in N.J.S.A. 10:4-12:

1. Negotiations
2. Litigation Update

Councilmember Fox made a motion to approve Resolution No. 2026-001 to convene a closed session meeting. The motion was seconded by Councilmember Collins and approved by all on a voice vote.

The Council returned to open session and Councilmember Reiss made a motion to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Councilmember Marks and approved by all on a voice vote. The meeting was therefore adjourned at 8:38 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Julie Falkenstein, RMC
Borough Clerk