



BOROUGH COUNCIL RECAP - February 17th, 2026

This post serves as an unofficial recap of tonight's council meeting, for members of the "Holler About Hightstown" group. All are encouraged to attend meetings or review official meeting minutes when posted to the borough website

<https://ecode360.com/HI1169/documents/Minutes?category=Borough%20Council>

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Health Officer Honored

Jill Swanson, the Borough's Health Officer of 14 years, was honored by Mayor Bluth. Now retired, Swanson served from 2012-2025 and oversaw compliance with state and local laws and regulations. Bluth cited the lasting positive impact of Swanson's contributions, crediting her for demonstrating "exceptional leadership, judgement, and calm during the COVID-19 pandemic."

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Support for Probasco Road Freight Bypass

At prior meetings, the Borough Council has voiced support for this project, which would add additional points of access to the Rt-133 bypass and alleviate truck traffic in Hightstown, primarily in the area of Wyckoff Mills Rd. At this meeting, a vote was passed to specifically support East Windsor's grant application to the FY2026 NJDOT Local Freight Impact Fund. If awarded, the grant funds would be added to \$2M in federal funds recently obtained by Congressman Herb Conaway.

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Retail Cannabis License

After a careful review of applications, the Borough Council voted to accept the recommendation of its Cannabis Advisory Committee, selecting Vivarium, LLC to receive a retail cannabis license. The business is proposed for 315 Franklin St (Englishtown Antiques building). Prior to opening, Vivarium must first receive its state license and pass through Borough zoning/planning approval. In supporting the application, Mayor Bluth spoke to its strong business plan, identification of qualified key personnel, and willingness to adopt a meaningful host community benefits agreement.

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Affordable Housing Discussion

The Borough is facing a March 16th deadline to implement its “Fourth Round” affordable housing plan, thereby meeting NJ’s constitutionally-mandated requirement to provide residents with affordable housing. The plan was adopted on May 12th, 2025, and the Borough must now implement this plan via zoning changes and edits to the Borough Code. Affordable housing, while not directly subsidized, aims to provide options for individuals with annual income of ~\$75,000 or below.

Hightstown proposes to meet this obligation by allowing denser multi-family housing on the current Empire Antiques property (Monmouth St) and at the corner of Summit St and Mercer St. Property owners there would be under no obligation to construct such housing, but would be granted the option to do so, provided they commit to making 20% of the units affordable.

The current Michael’s Plaza and former Lakeland Bank properties were seen as opportunities for mixed-use residential/commercial development (i.e. apartments above storefronts). These properties would be required to add multi-family housing if and when they were ever redeveloped. In return, the property owners would be permitted to build a fourth story - higher than the currently-allowed three stories.

Additionally, a series of technical updates to Borough Code governing affordable housing and development fees was discussed. New state laws have caused existing references in the Borough code to become out of date, pointing to obsolete state laws. The code updates discussed would not change the intent of the Borough Code or any fees, but would update references to the latest state laws, maintaining the code’s validity.

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Other Business

- The Borough received five bids for on-call services for water and sewer utilities, accepting three to create a pool of contractors who could be called upon for emergencies such as water main breaks.
- Council amended the Borough Administrator’s contract to provide flex time in lieu of paid overtime.
- The Police Department was approved to request excess Department of Defense equipment through the Defense Logistics Agency’s “Law Enforcement Support Office 1033 Program.”
- Council approved the membership of two new fire company members: Sean Ondich and Joseph Przybylowski.
- As discussed at the January 20th meeting, a series of building, construction, and housing fees updates were introduced. After no change for a decade or more, several fees were raised in the ballpark of ~\$50-150 (¼ to ⅓ increase). This level would match existing costs and be in line with what other local municipalities charge.

Administrator's Report

The first design proposal for Dawes Park playground equipment was received. The proposal featured a train theme to honor the history of the Camden & Amboy railroad. The Borough Administrator, John Roman, will now begin negotiating costs.

Roman also proposed a series of changes to curb illegal dumping in the downtown parking lot's four dumpsters. A focus since accepting his position, Roman has been working to clean up the lots. To that end, he asked Council to consider increasing the fees for dumping (currently \$50) and to fund the installation of new cameras.

Council & Committee Reports

Councilwoman Fowler informed residents that the Hightstown Police Department has enrolled in the SAFE (Secure Awareness First Encounters) program. This registry is for community members who are autistic or have communication disabilities. Residents can apply for the registry via forms on the Borough website.

The Memorial Day Parade committee is still accepting applications for marching groups and nominations for Grand Marshall. Interested applicants can email Councilwoman Fowler.

Councilman Franz shared that the Environmental Commission has applied for a grant to fund a pollinator garden in Rocky Brook Park. They expect to hear back in the May/June timeframe.

Councilman Cicalese reported that the Borough's new Health Commissioner is working to adopt the GEO 3.0 program for electronic permitting. This past month, the Board of Health held public programs on blood pressure and hand washing.

Cicalese recapped the fire department's January activity, spanning 41 calls: 3 in Robbinsville, 11 in Hightstown, 21 in East Windsor, 1 in West Windsor, 1 in Cranbury, and 4 on the Turnpike. He also commended them for their water and ice rescue drill over the weekend, as well as for receiving a letter of thanks from the Public Works Departments - having assisted the Borough with a frozen aerator pipe at the water treatment plant. Cicalese encouraged residents to donate to the all-volunteer company, which is actively fundraising, and mentioned to look out for news in the coming months on the department's antique truck, which is expected to head to a museum in the near future.

Mayor's Report

Mayor Bluth congratulated Borough Clerk, Peggy Riggio, who the International Institute of Municipal Clerks has recognized as a certified municipal clerk. Bluth stated that the IIMC has demanding educational requirements and requires a significant record of contributions to their local government and state.

The Borough's Economic Development Committee is forming, and a substantial number of applications have been received. The committee will begin meeting in March, so a deadline of Tuesday has been set for any final applications. The Historic Preservation Commission, newly reformed, will also begin meeting again with a 7PM session on Thursday at Old Hights Brewing Company.

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Executive Session

The meeting moved into a closed session where the Council discussed contract negotiations and matters of attorney client privilege.

Want to share this recap or read past meeting notes? Head to <https://www.hightstowndemocrats.com/council-recaps> for a full archive.