

BOROUGH OF NORWOOD
PLANNING BOARD
June 4, 2025
REGULAR MEETING

The Public Meeting of the Planning Board of the Borough of Norwood was held in council chambers on the above date.

Mr. Harper stated that the meeting was being held in accordance with the Open Public Meeting Act, pointed out the exits and asked everyone to stand and recite the Pledge of Allegiance.

Roll Call of the Board:

Mayor James Barsa	Present
Councilman Joseph Ascolese	Present
Mr. Christopher Jackson	Present
Mr. Walter Deptuch	Present
Mr. Allen Rapaport	Present
Mr. John Barry	Present
Mr. Travis Harper	Present
Ms. Kate Cerbasi	Present
Mr. Sal Nobile	Present
Mr. Paul Haberman	Present
Mr. Dominick Congiusti	Present
Ms. Heather Garcia	Present
Mr. Kevin Fischer	Present

Also, Present:

Mr. Robert Regan	Board Attorney
Mr. Scott Loverich	Borough Engineer
Ms. Lyndsay Knight	Borough Planner

Mr. Rapaport made a motion to approve the May 7, 2025 minutes. Mr. Barry seconded the motion and the Board unanimously agreed. Mr. Jackson and Mr. Fischer abstained.

Fourth Round Housing Element and Fair Share Plan

Mayors Remarks

As your Mayor, I want to address the recently proposed affordable housing plan and the number of units allocated to our community. I understand that this has been a difficult and often emotional topic, and I want to be transparent about our position and obligations.

First and foremost, while we may not fully agree with the number of affordable housing units required under the plan, we are bound by state law and court mandates that dictate how municipalities must comply with affordable housing obligations. We all understand the need for affordable housing, but it needs to be a controlled growth that does not lead to over development. These requirements are not optional. They are part of a broader legal framework established to ensure that all communities contribute their fair share to providing housing opportunities for low and moderate income families.

It is the current administration in Trenton that has put us in this position. In March of 2024 Governor Murphy signed an affordable housing legislation into law that enhanced the Mount Laurel Doctrine. Assembly Bill A-4 and Senate Bill S-50, collectively known as the Affordable Housing Reform Act, overhauls the state's approach to affordable housing, replacing the previous court-driven system with a more structured and administratively managed process.

If we choose not to comply with our proposed affordable housing plan, we risk losing control over local development. This means developers could potentially bypass our zoning laws and build larger, denser projects without our input – a situation known as a “builder’s remedy.” By accepting and implementing the plan, we retain the ability to shape where and how these units are built, preserving our community’s character as much as possible.

We began the fight by joining with 28 other municipalities to challenge the state’s affordable housing mandate. Norwood has entered into a lawsuit to get back control of affordable housing decisions. The lawsuit challenges the round 4 obligations by specifically questioning the continued exemption of approximately 62 urban aid municipalities.

After receiving our round 4 numbers from the State, which we felt were extreme, we proposed a new, more realistic and reasonable number of units which was objected to by the New Jersey Builders Association. This led to mediation where we did not agree to a settlement. We are currently waiting for our case to be assigned a Mount Laurel judge.

Over the last 20 years I have worked to revitalize our downtown without compromising the small town feel and charm of Norwood. The prior administration had to clear cut areas of town to build the various developments that exist today and are an important

part of Norwood's makeup. They also approved the building of over 30 residential homes per year. This was at a time when Norwood was still a growing municipality.

I want to assure you that throughout the process to determine our round 4 obligation number, we have worked hard to negotiate the best possible outcome for our town. We've prioritized smart planning and minimizing strain on our schools and infrastructure.

One of my top priorities as Mayor is ensuring that growth in our town is responsible, sustainable, and beneficial to the people who call this community home. While over development can bring economic opportunities, it must be done in a way that respects our roads, schools, and essential services. It must be controlled development. This is not about giving in – it's about protecting our community's long-term interests while meeting our legal obligations. I will continue to fight for what is best for Norwood.

Mr. Regan advised that notices have been provided to all required recipients.

Ms. Knight gave background on the new Affordable Housing rules and timeline set by the State of New Jersey. The Borough was given an excel document showing how the DCA determined the number of units for each municipality. The Borough was given a number of one hundred and sixty-two (162) units. The Borough did not feel this was an accurate number based on the mapping used by the DCA. The Borough felt the correct number is one hundred thirty (130) units. The NJ Builders Association challenged the Borough's proposed number. After going to mediation, the Borough did not accept a settlement and is awaiting to be assigned a Mount Laurel Judge.

Part of the Fair Share is going through all vacant lands in the Borough. Once those lots are determined the Planner goes parcel by parcel to see if any of these lots are buildable. There were only three (3) properties in the Borough that can be developed on. Due to the six (6) units by acre formula, the properties would allow for seven (7) units. After these units are built that would leave one hundred fifty-five (155) units of unmet need.

The Fair Share plan also proposed overlay zones.

The realistic development potential shows thirteen (13) units towards the unmet need. Legislation allows for 50% of the units to be family units.

Mr. Rapaport asked if block 183 lot 1.01 on McCellan is part of Borough owned land. Ms. Knight said that it is privately owned vacant land. The zoning can be put in place but we cannot force the owner to build anything. Mr. Loverich said the vacant land adjustment is to find how many units can actually be built. Once they know the number that can be built they begin to find a buildable location.

Mayor Barsa said the Meadowlands Conservation Trust was signed in 2006. That land is no longer in control of the Borough and most of the land is wet lands. The Board of Education owns a piece of land in the entrance of Northwoods.

Mr. Rapaport said the DCA did not do their due diligence to see what was buildable and throw that responsibility back on the Borough. Mr. Regan said one hundred fifty-nine (159) municipalities found errors in the DCA mapping.

Councilman Ascolese said the DCA did it more global and didn't go into specific properties. Mr. Regan said the DCA included parcels that were already under construction for the 3rd round obligations. Mr. Regan said the plan would be the same whether the number was one hundred sixty-two (162) or one hundred thirty (130).

Mayor Barsa said you have to grow the community in a controlled manner.

Councilman Ascolese asked what the numbers for rounds one (1) through three (3) were. Mr. Loverich said the DCA gave the Borough a number of 267 units for the 3rd round and the Borough Planner determined it should be 46 units.

Mr. Nobile feels the large industrial properties that are empty could be turned into large affordable housing properties. Mayor Barsa said that it is not possible to build large affordable properties. The height requirement is thirty-five (35) feet. Norwood could not have a seven-story building.

Mayor Barsa said Trenton wants all municipalities to be urban. Norwood is not an urban community. Norwood is a 2 square mile suburb. The State cannot produce enough energy for what we have now.

Mr. Regan said the plans need to be approved, but that does not mean a developer will build the units.

Councilman Ascolese said there are sixty-two (62) municipalities that are not required to provide affordable housing.

Mr. Rapaport made a motion to open the meeting to the public. Mayor Barsa seconded the motion and the Board unanimously agreed.

Mayank Rastogi, 15 Clinton Street. Mr. Rastogi asked what the other towns are doing regarding the numbers they were given and how they are handling the situation, such as Alpine or Short Hills. Mr. Nobile said Short Hills has a lot of land to develop. Mr. Barsa said the Borough is in a lawsuit with multiple towns. Mr. Rastogi said if you end up in a stalemate and don't build you would lose on lawyer's fees.

Mayor Barsa made a motion to close the meeting to the public. Ms. Cerbasi seconded the motion and the Board unanimously agreed.

Mayor Barsa said the infrastructure is the biggest problem in the State.

Mayor Barsa made a motion to approve the Fourth Round Housing Element and Fair Share Plan. Ms. Cerbasi seconded the motion and the Board unanimously agreed.

Councilman Ascolese made a motion to approve the resolution for application PB 25-03, 855 Broadway. Mr. Rapaport seconded the motion and the Board unanimously agreed.

Mr. Rapaport made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Councilman Ascolese seconded the motion and the Board unanimously agreed.

Mr. Harper thanked the Board and adjourned the meeting.

Respectfully Submitted,

Lindsay Volpitta
Board Secretary