

**MINUTES
BOROUGH OF NEW MILFORD
7:00 PM PUBLIC MEETING
Monday, March 30, 2026**



OPEN SESSION:

Mayor Putrino called the meeting to order, asked for a moment of silent prayer and/or reflection, and led the flag salute. Mayor Putrino read the statement of compliance with the Open Public Meetings Act and the mission statement and pointed out the fire exits.

Councilwoman Lisa Sandhusen	Present
Councilman Art Zeilner	Absent
Councilwoman Randi Duffie	Present
Councilman Ira Grotsky	Present
Council President Matthew Seymour	Present
Councilwoman Hedy Grant	Present
Mayor Michael Putrino	Present

Also Present: J. Shahdanian – Borough Attorney; W. Rupp – Borough Attorney;
C. Demiris – Administrator/Borough Clerk

**PRESENTATION: BRUNETTI ORGANIZATION –
 BROOKCHESTER SHOPPING CENTER**

Mr. Norin recapped the details of the proposed development. He said it would be a mixed used development consisting of 150 residential units, 27,000 square feet of commercial/retail, and 390 parking spaces. He said one of the major concerns raised at the prior meeting was the number of school-aged children that would be generated by the development. Mr. Norin said they reviewed the Rutgers study he referenced at that meeting and said according to that study there are three main indicators: the number of bedrooms, the density of the project, and the level of income. He said low rise, lower density developments and lower income levels produce a greater number of school-aged children. He said developments, such as what is being proposed, generally attract young professionals and empty nesters.

Mr. Norin said based upon the calculations in the study the 120 market rate units will generate 7 school-aged children and the 30 affordable units will generate 20 school-aged children. He said the study further indicates that approximately 12% of school-aged children are home schooled or attend private school, which means the impact would be 24 school-aged children or 2 per grade. He said the number of children in New Milford schools is a little over 2,000 and it has remained consistent over time. He said a 1% increase should have minimal impact on New Milford schools.

Mr. Norin was asked when the study was conducted. He said that it is from 2018 and noted that there is no other study more current.

Council President Seymour asked Mr. Norin if he was saying that the only reliable estimate is based upon the wealth of the families that live there. Mr. Norin said income is one of the three indicators. Council President Seymour asked what if the estimates are wrong. Mr. Norin said he is confident in the numbers and the data.

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Council President Seymour made a motion to open the meeting for public comment. Councilwoman Duffie seconded the motion. The motion carried. All present in favor, none opposed.

Greg Kuko came forward. Mr. Kuko commented on the increased load to gas and water systems caused by large developments. He further commented on the previous sale of elementary schools in New Milford and the subsequent need to make additions to two of the remaining schools.

Richard Sablowski came forward. Mr. Sablowski commented on the loss of 17,000 square feet of retail and asked if there was any way to redesign the development to maintain the existing amount of retail. Mr. Norin said the original plan was for just the CVS to remain, but more retail was added to address concerns from the Borough. He said it is limited by the amount of parking required. He went on to note that retail is being added to two other River Road developments, with the amount of retail on the River Road corridor staying the same. Mr. Sablowski asked if they would be getting a tax abatement from either the town or the state. Mr. Norin said it has not been decided but it is something they will be seeking. Mr. Sablowski asked if they will conduct any studies on the sewer system. Mr. Norin said that they will and that anything necessary will be addressed.

Michelle Roth came forward. Ms. Roth said PILOTs are for undeveloped or underdeveloped properties and asked how this property would qualify. She said historically a PILOT provides for a payment of 1.5% to 2% of earned income from the development and would last up to thirty years. She said this would be a significant savings to the developer and asked what they would give back to the town in return. Mr. Norin said that it would be the subject of future negotiations with the Borough. He said they will have to demonstrate the PILOT is necessary in order for the development to be financially viable to produce the affordable units required by state law.

Carrie Hittel came forward. Ms. Hittel asked if the development would make use of renewable energy. She was advised that the development would include renewable energy features, but the specifics have not been determined.

Carol Hill came forward. Ms. Hill questioned why the CVS portion of the building is still viable when it is just as old as the rest of the building. Mr. Norin said the long-term lease makes the maintenance of the building viable. Ms. Hill asked if the Borough has fire trucks that can handle four story buildings. Mayor Putrino said we do. Ms. Hill commented on the aesthetics of the building as presented and said it does not fit with New Milford. Mr. Norin said they welcome this type of feedback.

Marie Thompson came forward. Ms. Thompson referenced the Rutgers study and asked if there were any studies available with numbers post Covid. She was advised that there are not.

Ethan Kim came forward. Mr. Kim expressed concern for the employees of the shopping center and asked if there was any plan to address the unemployment.

Michael Mean came forward. Mr. Mean also expressed concern about the unemployment that will result from the elimination of the existing retail establishments.

Sharon Hillmer came forward. Ms. Hilmer asked if they would be submitting the plans to the DEP given the proximity to the river. Mr. Noris said they will comply with all requirements and would submit an application to the DEP if necessary.

Felix Bolinga came forward. Mr. Bolinga asked if they intend to do any traffic studies noting it is already an overcrowded street. He also asked how it would affect the Police and Fire Departments. Mr. Norin said they will do a traffic study as the project proceeds and would be responsible for any necessary improvements. Mr. Norin said the revenue generated by these types of developments dwarfs the expenses they generate to the town.

Mark Garavilles came forward. Mr. Garavilles said his primary concern is the addition of more students to an already strained school system. He said a 2018 study is pre-pandemic; the information is dated. Mr. Norin said the study is still regarded as the gold standard. Mr. Garavilles suggested the property should be donated to the town.

Lorraine McMackin came forward. Ms McMackin said PILOTs are granted to areas in need of redevelopment. She said the Borough's Master Plan does not identify this property as an area in need of redevelopment. Ms. McMackin said New Milford has one of the lowest percentages of retail in Bergen County and suggested they should consider building up the retail instead of tearing it down and asked why they haven't refurbished the second floor of the building to get the most benefit out of it. She said people in town rely on these stores.

Dan Monte came forward. Mr. Monte presented the governing body with four pages of questions on a wide variety of topics including property ownership, financials, mission, and values. He asked about the burden to the school system, tax incentives sought, and parking.

Brent Friedman came forward. Ms. Friedman asked about the other River Road development previously referenced. Mayor Putrino said it is another potential development but would not be discussed during this presentation. Ms. Friedman asked why the Brunetti development is being considered when it was stated that the property is zoned primarily for commercial use with just a small residential component. Mr. Shahdanian said it would be subject to a lengthy approval process. Ms. Friedman asked if they could be held to the current zoning. Mr. Shahdanian said the Borough has a state-mandated affordable housing obligation and must provide a reasonable opportunity for development that will satisfy this obligation.

Donna Citria came forward. Ms. Citria asked if senior citizen housing would count toward the affordable housing obligation. She was advised that it would qualify but that it cannot be

accommodated in this development because it is unlawful to age restrict the units unless they are in a separate building of age restricted only units. It was noted senior citizens would be eligible to rent affordable units in this development; they just could not be restricted to only senior citizens. Ms. Citria said organizations such as the United Way are interested in providing affordable housing for individuals with special needs and asked who they could contact to discuss opportunities. Mr. Norin said he would provide her with contact information.

Barbara Paladino came forward. Ms. Paladino referenced the Mt. Laurel mandate and asked how many units make up New Milford's obligation. Mayor Putrino said 368. Ms. Paladino asked if New Milford has enough real estate to meet that obligation. Mayor Putrino said it does not but that we are required to continue to explore potential opportunities.

Jody Siefert came forward. Ms. Siefert expressed her thanks to the New Milford Police Officers who came to the aid of the young man at last week's meeting. Ms. Siefert said something needs to be done to address the deficiencies of the existing Brookchester apartments before moving on to a new development.

Dan Ferretti came forward. Mr. Ferretti commented on crime and said the rental owners are not doing their job in vetting their tenants. He said the developer stands to make a lot of money from the residential units and retail and needs to give back to the town.

Maura Kelly came forward. Ms. Kelly suggested residents need to stay involved as the project progresses. She asked how long this has been being discussed. Mr. Norin said the Brunetti Organization approached the Borough about a year ago and has been going through an adversarial process and has attempted to resolve it through mediation. Ms. Kelly asked if they had considered solar power for the new building and when they would expect to break ground. Mr. Norin said it would be at least two years away and there would need to be a settlement of the affordable housing dispute before it could progress.

Tony Bell came forward. Mr. Bell said he found it concerning that the taxpayers' only recourse is to come and voice their concerns.

Emily Totaro came forward. Ms. Totaro said the existing apartments do not qualify toward the affordable housing obligation because Brookchester is unwilling to fix them so they would qualify. She noted the empty storefronts in the development on New Bridge Road and suggested Brunetti should take care of what they have before developing anything new.

Christine Brewster came forward. Ms. Brewster commented on New Milford's proximity to New York and noted that this makes up much of the influx of people coming to New Milford.

Terrence McMackin came forward. Mr. McMackin thanked all the men and women serving in the armed services. He expressed concern about school, sewer and traffic impacts and asked who will bear the financial burdens caused by the development. He said the Brunetti Organization can't make any guarantees about the proposed effects and said there is the potential need for more police officers, new fire equipment, and a partially paid fire department.

Gail Ablamsky came forward. Ms. Ablamsky asked what will happen to the fourteen stores currently located in the shopping center.

Ronnie Lazarus came forward. Ms. Lazarus referenced the flooding that sometimes happens at the rear of the complex and asked if they have studied the potential impact of this development. Mr. Norin said it is very early in the process, and it will all be addressed as the project progresses.

Casey Hittel came forward. Ms. Hittel said she too attended high school with Mayor Putrino.

Being no other member of the public who wished to comment, Councilman Grotsky made a motion to closed to the public. Council President Seymour seconded the motion. The motion carried. All present in favor, none opposed.

ADJOURNMENT

Councilwoman Duffie made a motion to adjourn. Councilman Grotsky seconded the motion. The motion carried. All present in favor, none opposed. Time 8:49 PM.

Respectfully submitted,



Christine Demiris, RMC, CMC, MMC
Borough Clerk