



Frenchtown Sun

A Frenchtown-Focused Civic Newsletter

Frenchtown's 2026 Municipal Budget Approved—and Explained

Borough Council approved the municipal budget for 2026 on May 6. In New Jersey, municipal budgets are typically adopted later in the spring because municipalities must wait for finalized figures related to state aid, county taxes and other funding obligations before accurately completing the budget process.

The borough's 2026 budget totals \$2,886,272.08; Mayor Brad Myhre says that the budget reflects a continued effort to maintain essential services while remaining mindful of the affordability challenges facing residents. The most significant driver of increased spending this year was the sharp rise in employee health care costs. Local government employers participating in the New Jersey State Health Benefits Program (NJSHBP) are facing a substantial 36.2% premium increase for Plan Year 2026, creating added financial pressure for municipalities across the state. Brad notes that, despite these rising costs, the borough's 2026 budget maintains staffing levels and includes only modest adjustments in other spending areas. *[Continued on page 2]*



Photographer: Paul Serra

Madison Rose Finery Opens on Bridge St.

Madison Rose Finery is the new boutique at 22 Bridge St., a space formerly occupied by the Sublime gift shop.

Gemologist and designer Madison Rose Whitman offers fine antique and estate jewelry, responsibly sourced gemstones, and an ever-evolving collection of handmade art and gifts. The shop provides a full range of jewelry services, including custom design, repair and restoration, appraisals, estate buying, consignment, expert consultations, and rare object sourcing.

"The boutique blends expertise, artistry, and storytelling, offering both locals and visitors a place to find meaningful gifts, celebrate milestones, or simply wander and be inspired," says Madison Rose. "Drawing

on a deep passion for gemology, natural history, and the wonder of discovery, the showroom is a quietly enchanting space where curious objects blur the line between adornment and artifact."

Madison Rose delights in uncovering the details that bring pieces to life, whether identifying an obscure maker's mark, interpreting the unique inclusions of a gemstone, or answering the question, "Is this a meteorite?" She says, "I enjoy helping people discover what they have, and what those pieces could become."

She feels that "adornment is one of the most beautiful ways to experience the world. There is something powerful about natural treasures shaped over time and brought to life by skilled hands. Sharing that with others is at the heart of what I do," says Madison Rose.

Her email address is hello@madisonrosefinery.com.

About *The Frenchtown Sun*

The Frenchtown Sun is published monthly by the Borough of Frenchtown to provide its residents with local news and community updates.

The content of *The Sun* is guided by the editorial team of Ted Brandston, Randi Eckel, Rick Epstein, John Gattuso, Jeanne Herb, Amelia Rodriguez and Maria Whelan. John Dougherty serves as the Borough Council liaison.

The Sun is delivered monthly free of charge to all Frenchtown Borough residents. An online edition is available at www.frenchtownsun.net.

Borough residents can request postal delivery or contact the editorial team at newsletter@frenchtownboro.com or mail *The Frenchtown Sun*, 29 Second Street, Frenchtown, N.J. 08825.

2026 Municipal Budget Approved

[Continued from page 1] A municipal budget in New Jersey is a mandatory, legally binding annual plan that outlines how a town will raise and spend money. It sets spending limits, determines the municipal property tax levy, and allocates money for services like police, public works, parks and the library.

In New Jersey, municipal budgets are capped so that property taxes cannot be increased by more than 2% over the previous year, but there are some exceptions. Additionally, New Jersey municipalities may not increase spending by more than 3.5% over the previous year, with some exceptions.

The municipal budget is a financial blueprint divided into three primary sections. The Operating Budget covers the day-to-day "costs of doing business," such as salaries for police and public works, trash collection, etc. Long-term investments for the borough's infrastructure, like road paving and equipment upgrades, are managed through the Capital Budget, while the Debt Service portion is dedicated to paying the principal and interest on the funds borrowed to complete major projects. By balancing these three areas, the borough strives to ensure that current service needs are met while responsibly planning for the community's future stability.

Understanding a municipal budget can be a challenging and complex endeavor; a few important pieces of background can help:

- **Sources of revenue:** Local property taxes are the largest source of revenue contributing to the municipal budget. However, other revenue may include state aid; state and county grants for one-time costs such as transportation and parks projects; payments in lieu of taxes; fees, including sewer fees paid by borough property owners, other fees and permits such as building permits, marriage licenses, liquor licenses, and zoning fees; revenue generated

from traffic violations and local ordinance infractions; and surplus funds from the previous year. Local property taxes fund 57.65% of this year's budget, with 42.35% coming from those other sources. The borough's chief financial officer indicates that the 2025 tax collection rate improved from 2024 and that the rate for 2026 is still inconclusive.

- **Municipal tax levy:** It is important for readers to understand that the *property tax rate* is the total rate applied to a home's assessed value, covering local, school, and county expenses, while the *municipal tax rate* is only the portion of that total rate specifically dedicated to fund the borough's government services (such as police, public works, etc.).

- In 2025, Frenchtown's *property tax rate* was \$2.731 per \$100 of assessed value, which is generally in line with the Hunterdon County average of 2.72%. The tax rate for the 2026 budget cannot yet be determined while necessary information from schools and the county is still outstanding. About 24% of each resident's total property tax bill goes toward municipal services (police, library, DPW, administration) while the remainder goes to the Frenchtown Elementary School, the Del Val Regional High School and county agencies.

- The borough's 2026 municipal tax rate is 0.6744 per \$100 of assessed home valuation, representing an increase of 2.9 cents (\$.029 per \$100 of assessed valuation) over the prior year's municipal rate. This represents an annual increase of approximately \$103 on a home assessed at \$350,000 or \$133 on a home assessed at \$450,000. As mentioned previously, the municipal tax rate represents borough services only. The borough's budget remains in compliance with New Jersey's 2% levy cap law, given several budget items that are excluded from the mandatory cap, such as debt service, pension contributions, some health care costs and certain emergencies. [Continued on page 3]

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[Continued from page 2]

- **Municipal spending:** Total spending in the recently approved 2026 municipal budget is \$2,886,272.08. The borough's operating budget remained roughly flat (excluding grants and increases in health care costs) and the capital budget remained flat for 2026. Debt service increased 1.6% in 2026 due to bond anticipation notices for several borough infrastructure projects.

- **Who does what:** Several important officials contribute to the development and management of the borough finances:

- The Chief Financial Officer, **JANET PRIVETTE**, manages the municipal treasury. She is responsible for developing the annual budget and ensuring all spending complies with strict New Jersey laws. She oversees long-term debt. Janet can be reached at: cfo@frenchtownboro.gov or by calling (908) 996-4524 – Option 3

- The Tax Assessor, **ERICA BRANDMAIER**, determines the fair market value of every property in the borough to ensure that the tax burden is distributed fairly. She is responsible for maintaining property records and tax maps, processing

property transfers and deeds, reviewing applications for tax exemptions or deductions (such as those for seniors, veterans or non-profits), and defending assessments during tax appeals. Erica holds office hours at Borough Hall on the first Monday of each month, 5:30-7 p.m. She can be reached at: ebrandmaier@frenchtownboro.gov or calling (908) 996-4524 – Option 4.

- The Tax Collector, **ANNE MARIE SILVIA**, is responsible for calculating individual tax bills based on the assessment and the current tax rate, mailing out the quarterly tax bills, processing payments and managing interest on delinquent accounts, and conducting tax lien sales if taxes remain unpaid. Anne Marie Silvia holds office hours at Borough Hall on Mondays, 5:30-8:30 p.m. with appointments available upon request. She can be reached at: taxcollector@frenchtownboro.gov or by calling (908) 996-4524 – Option 5.

The municipal budget story is ongoing, and *The Sun* will provide updates and clarification as we receive more information throughout the year.

Frenchtown Elementary School Leadership



KATE NUGENT has served on the Frenchtown Board of Education for 20 years, and as president for most of that time. Frenchtown has a seven-member elected board whose job is to ensure that the school is well run. Their duties include setting district policies and goals,

overseeing the budget, hiring and evaluating administrators, and serving as the communications link between the community and the school. As president, Kate is the primary spokesperson for the board. She ensures that meetings are conducted efficiently and works closely with the superintendent to discuss long-range plans. The responsibilities of the president are different from other board members, but her authority is not. She still only has one vote.

Kate and her husband have lived in their home on Third Street since 1995 and have raised four children who all attended Frenchtown Elementary School and Del Val High School.

JIM HINTENACH, known to students and staff as Mr. H, is our chief school administrator. He oversees the daily operations of the school, working closely with administrators, teachers, support staff, students, and families, striving to ensure a positive and successful learning environment for all.



Jim's role is to implement the board's vision and policies.

Jim is a graduate of Del Val High School who spent nearly the first 20 years of his career working in a private special education school, serving and supporting students with multiple disabilities. Now in his seventh year at the Frenchtown School, Jim is most proud of the dedicated Frenchtown School team, as well as the many meaningful community relationships he has built throughout his time in Frenchtown.

Jim resides in Holland Township with his supportive wife, their two children, and their dog, Tank.

Community Calendar

TUESDAY, JUNE 2

- **New Jersey Primary Election Day, 6 a.m.-8 p.m.**, Find your polling place at <https://voter.svrs.nj.gov/>.
- **Super Seniors, 11 a.m.-1:30 p.m.**, Presbyterian Church, 20 Fourth St. Sponsored by Harvest Family Success Center, it's secular. Free for adults over 55 (but younger people are welcome, too). Yoga with Priscilla, lunch, guest speaker Susan Lang-Saponara, ShopRite nutritionist.

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 3

Borough Council Meeting, 7 p.m., Borough Hall, 29 Second St.

THURSDAY, JUNE 4

Clam Night at the American Legion, 5 p.m., 510 Harrison St.

TUESDAY, JUNE 9

Environmental Commission Meeting, 7 p.m., Borough Hall, 29 Second St.

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 10

Veterans' Breakfast at the American Legion, 8-10 a.m., 510 Harrison St.

FRIDAY, JUNE 12

DVRHS Class of 2026 Commencement, 10 a.m., Del Val Regional High School, 19 Senator Stout Rd.

TUESDAY, JUNE 16

- **Super Seniors, 11 a.m.-1:30 p.m.**, Presbyterian Church, 20 Fourth St. Sponsored by Harvest Family Success Center, it's secular. Free for adults over 55 (but younger people are welcome, too). Yoga with Priscilla, lunch, guest speaker Michelle Collins on fun with music.
- **Frenchtown School Board Meeting, 6:45 p.m.**, 902 Harrison St. (School Library)

THURSDAY, JUNE 18

Clam Night at the American Legion, 5 p.m., 510 Harrison St.

SATURDAY, JUNE 20

- **Hunterdon County Household Hazardous Waste Cleanup Day, 9 a.m.-1 p.m.**, Hunterdon County Complex, Rt. 12 Raritan Twp.
- **Frenchtown Farmers Market, 10 a.m.-2 p.m.**, Sunbeam Park

SUNDAY, JUNE 21

Breakfast at Darcy Lodge, 8-11 a.m., 39 Everittstown Rd., \$12 per person ages 13+, \$7 per person ages 6-12, children under 5 eat free; all-you-can-eat buffet.

TUESDAY, JUNE 23

Pride Week Event: Queer Kickball, 6-8 p.m., Old Frenchtown Field, open to people of all ages; the first 22 interested players will be fielded to a team.
Rain date: Wednesday, June 24

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 24

- **Veteran's Breakfast at the American Legion, 8-10 a.m.**, 510 Harrison St.
- **Planning/Zoning Board Meeting, 7 p.m.**, Borough Hall, 29 Second St.

FRIDAY, JUNE 26

Pride Week Event: Pride Chalking, 5-8 p.m., Downtown sidewalks, all are invited to grab colorful chalk, draw images and write messages of love and pride on the sidewalks.

SATURDAY, JUNE 27

Hunterdon County Electronic Waste Recycling Day, 9 a.m.-1 p.m., Hunterdon County Complex, Rt. 12 Raritan Twp.

- **Pride Week Event: Parade & Picnic, 12-4 p.m.**, Parade begins at 12:30 on Race St., rounding the corner onto Bridge Street, and ending at Sunbeam Park for a picnic with live music, light fare and refreshments.

SAVE THE DATE:

- **Bastille Day, Sunday, July 12, 11 a.m.-6 p.m.**
- **Riverfest, Sunday, Sept. 6, 11 a.m.-7 p.m.**
- **Frenchtown School's Centennial Celebration & Community Day, Saturday, Sept. 26**

It's Time to Vote! NJ Primaries on June 2

The New Jersey Primary Election is June 2. Votes can be cast at Borough Hall from 6 a.m. to 8 p.m. on Election Day.

Age-friendly Frenchtown

Borough Council will vote whether to endorse an Age-Friendly Action Plan at the June 3 meeting. The plan is the result of a year-long effort supported by a grant from the state Department of Human Services. The Action Plan can be found on the borough website. The next step is to send it for review by the state.

Valuable information collected as part of Frenchtown's Age-Friendly initiative includes the following:

- Frenchtown residents over the age of 55 comprised 16.7% of the total population in 1990. This population has more than doubled to 35.8% by 2020.
- The median year that structures were built in Frenchtown is 1938 compared to 1979 for Hunterdon County and 1970 for the state. Many older residents have talked about the need for home renovations that will allow them to "age in place."
- The median income for Frenchtown residents 65 and older is \$67,596 compared to \$90,843 Hunterdon county-wide.
- The percentage of Frenchtown borough households that are rentals is 47%. At recent Mayor's Age-Friendly Town Hall meetings, residents have commented on the need for actions that ensure that older rental residents are living in homes that are healthy and safe.

News from Hunterdon Senior Center

The Hunterdon County Senior Center is celebrating the 250th anniversary of America's Declaration of Independence with a series of monthly lectures and events. These offerings support lifelong learning and socialization. The series includes a presentation titled "George Washington and Morristown New Jersey...Perfect Together!" This discussion will take place at the Senior Center on Friday, June 12, at 11:30. Call by June 8 to register at 908-788-1359.

The Senior Center also continues to offer nutrition and wellness lectures that also include topics like dental hygiene and foot care as you age. Other upcoming programs include:

- Fitness workshops in summer and fall, targeted at posture, strength, mobility, flexibility and fall prevention. Preventing falls and reducing the fear of falling through discussion and exercise helps seniors maintain their independence.
- Instructors will demonstrate classic ballroom dances on Sunday, June 28, 1:30-3 p.m. at Courtyard Luxury Senior Living at 111 W. Main St., Clinton, NJ 08809. To register by June 16, please call the Senior

Center at 908-788-1359, or email Kelly at khughes@co.hunterdon.nj.us.

Frenchtown residents are also encouraged to check out the county's *Seasoned Years* newsletter which provides updates and news as well as helpful county resources for older residents. You can find the newsletter at:

<https://www.co.hunterdon.nj.us/493/Seasoned-Years-Newsletter>.

Residents can also sign up to receive monthly emails from the county Division of Senior, Disability and Veterans' Services with updates on programs and services. Just call the senior center at 908-788-1359 or email seniorcenter@co.hunterdon.nj.us and request being added to the monthly email list.

Membership to the Senior Center is free; you must be a resident of Hunterdon County and at least 60 years of age. For more information, call 908-788-1359 or check out the website at:

<https://www.co.hunterdon.nj.us/495/Senior-Center>.

You can also email Senior Center Supervisor Shalini Mathur at smathur@co.hunterdon.nj.us.

Flag Installation for June Pride Week

Frenchtown Pride Week is June 22-28. Bridge Street will be awash in colorful rainbow Pride flags, installed by the Frenchtown Pride volunteers. All residents and visitors are welcome to join in and enjoy Pride Week, events include a kickball game, sidewalk chalk decoration and a Pride parade and picnic (*see Community Calendar on page 4 for more details*).

Update on S. Washington St. Construction

The April issue of *The Sun* reported that improvements to South Washington Street would begin right away. But construction was delayed due to contractor scheduling and winter maintenance. At this writing, construction is slated to begin around May 25 and continue for about 30 days.

Corrections

- *The Sun's* May issue invited residents to reserve Borough Park for personal use. Residents can only reserve the park's picnic pavilion.
- Also in May, *The Sun* misstated the amount of the grant from the state Department of Transportation to improve Creek Road. The state grant is for \$195,418. That is 48% of the cost of the Creek Road project; 52% will be financed by the borough.
- May's article about invasive vines failed to italicize the Latin names of the vine and the weevil.

Graduating FES Eighth Grade Class Looking Ahead to High School in the Fall

Eight Frenchtown Elementary School students are graduating from eighth grade this spring and heading to high school in the fall. Several of them have shared what they are looking forward to the most in high school. A special thank you to teacher Elizabeth McCann for her years of dedicated service to Frenchtown's students and for her assistance with this article.

CRISTIANO CARDOSO: I think what I am looking forward to the most in high school is the hour-long lunchtime and the shorter days. I am also looking forward to the gym.

ANNIKA HARTOBEY: What I look forward to the most in high school is how much opportunity there is. I'm very grateful to have gone to Frenchtown with how small it is and the relationships I have. Having so many options for clubs, sports and friends at the high school is a plus for me.

HAILEY MAHON: What I am looking forward to the most in high school is speech and debate and Model UN and heightened academic standards. Both model UN and debate are something I want to pursue as a career in the future. I also look forward to having more responsibility and opportunities as I attend high school.

ROBERT RAPOLLA: I'm looking forward to high school sports, the electrical program, making new friends and getting life experience such as driving. I'm looking forward to finding the next level of my education.

RONIN SEGARRA: I'm looking forward to the high school soccer team. There will be new challenges for me and it will test my skills.

ROSALIE STRASSER: I am most excited for the new experiences and opportunities that come with high school. I love having been at a small school but the high school has so many things that allow students to branch out and meet new people that aren't offered here at Frenchtown. Also, Del Val has so many cool programs and events that are exciting to experience.

ISAAC GILHEANY: In high school, I am looking forward to the change in schedule and the freedom I get with my schedule. I am also looking forward to the extended lunch period. The schedule would put less stress on deadlines and homework and, during lunch, I can do some of my work.



*The Frenchtown eighth-graders are (front row, left to right): Zöe Tober, Hailey Mahon, Robert Rapolla, Rosalie Strasser (back row) Ms. Wirascki, Cristiano Cardoso, Ronin Segarra, and Annika Hartobey.
Missing: Isaac Gilheany*

Frenchtown Elementary School Honor Roll

FES students listed in the third-marking period honor roll include:

High Honor Roll: Sixth-graders Mia Dermody, Claire Higgins, Rian Nakahara and Claudette Tober.

Honor Roll: Fifth-grader Spencer Elphick; sixth-graders Liam Boyd, Beatrice Cooke, Olive Olson and Oliver Rodriguez; and eighth-graders Isaac Gilheany and Hailey Mahon.

A Friendly Greeting Makes a Difference

Several long-time Frenchtown residents have noticed a shift: more people are skipping a "hello" when encountering their neighbors, even when someone else starts the greeting. These locals miss that old-school friendliness, noting that Frenchtown has always been a community where people look out for one another. Research shows that a simple greeting is more than just good manners—it makes people feel seen and helps neighbors feel connected. By speaking up, you break the ice and demonstrate a more welcoming community. Next time you're out on the path, consider a hearty "hello!" You'll be glad you did.

Library Board Elects Officers

The Frenchtown library's Board of Trustees has chosen Nick Barbaree as president; Carole Pepe, vice president; Jackie Campbell, secretary; and Suzanne Snyder, treasurer.

In May, Borough Council passed a resolution authorizing the hiring of professional services to prepare a request for proposals for making improvements to the library. A state grant will pay for the improvements, which will include better lighting.

What WWII Troops Told the Principal



In the cellar of the Frenchtown School, there are many things, including 75 cardboard banker's boxes. Most of them are filled with boring stuff like old invoices, audit reports, school-board meeting agendas and minutes, and personnel and student records.

But one of them contains a thick folder full of letters and postcards received by Principal Bert

Light during World War II. He was in charge of the K-12 school in 1931-59, and was something of a father figure. He'd been an Army officer in World War I. So, some of his alumni, in uniform, wrote home to him.

Coast Guard Yeoman 3rd Class Charles Strouse (Frenchtown High School Class of '42), stationed in Ketchikan, Alaska, wrote of "the most miserable weather I have ever had to experience. It is constantly raining, snowing or drizzly... The ground is muddy and it's usually foggy."

His classmate Vernon L. Wood of the Army Air Corps apologized for "griping" about Coach Miller's tough workouts, which have been "of great advantage to me during the time I have been in the service."

That coach, Bill Miller, then a lieutenant in the Navy, sent his former boss a three-page typewritten report on the sugar and pineapple crops on Oahu, Hawaii, the architecture of the schools there, and the style of high-school football played there. "They play a very open game and flip the old apple around like a basketball most of the time."

John L. Case Jr. wrote from an Army air base in New Hampshire. He ask for a recommendation to be a flying cadet, instead of a clerk in a quartermaster

company. But he praised his Frenchtown High School training, noting that "only about 30% of all clerks in the Army can really type the correct way."

Infantry Pvt. Clarence Kirk, part of the Sicily invasion, was having a pleasant interlude in August of 1943. Sitting in the shade of an olive tree, he wrote, "The people were very glad to see us and said we should have come three years ago. There is plenty of fruit such as [indecipherable], lemons, figs, and some orange... We go swimming quite often and spend the rest of our free moments trying to talk to Italian fruit peddlers." The only clouds in his blue sky seemed to be the low quality of Italian stationery and marching up the Sicilian hills.

Kenneth L. Blanchard (Class of '44), a Seabee stationed on Okinawa, wrote in 1945 of Japanese air raids, and Eli E. Hager (Class of '48) wrote in 1951 from the USS Walke, a destroyer stationed off northern Korea. He mentioned a time when his ship exchanged fire with a shore battery. His was the only letter from that war.

Most of the men were grimly determined to do their duty. But Pvt. Manuel Severs (Class of '41) was jubilant. He wrote from Parris Island, S.C., in September of 1942, "I love the Marine life in every way" and vowed that if he survived the war, he would re-enlist. "We receive the best training of any soldier in the world. Therefore, we have full confidence in our selves and the weapons we use." He achieved sharpshooter status with the .45 pistol and the .30-caliber 1903 Springfield rifle. "It makes me feel great to know that I will stand up before any enemy and know that I can fire my rifle better than he."

He happily listed all the other firearms he learned to use, including the Browning automatic rifle, the Reising submachine gun, and the .50-caliber machine gun. But the new M-1 rifle was his favorite. It was "well-constructed," easy to aim, and equipped with a clip of eight bullets, three more than the Springfield. He relished bayonet and grenade practice and the instruction in hand-to-hand fighting that made Marines more than a match for Japan's best scrappers. He was also enjoying the "chow," which was plain but plentiful. "I wouldn't trade places with any man in the world," he wrote.

None of the letter writers offered details of frontline combat, perhaps for security reasons, but they do give glimpses into a chapter of world history through letters that landed in the principal's in-box.

By Rick Epstein, adapted from Terriers Forever!, a soon-to-be-published book commemorating the 100th anniversary of the Frenchtown School.

Frenchtown then & now

The Hummer Building, as some of the old-timers call it, is on the left. The western half of it was built by druggist and liniment manufacturer Albert Williams right after the Great Fire of 1878 on the ashes of his former building. The original tenant on the corner was George W. Hummer's furniture and undertaking business. Williams' pharmacy was next



door. Lorenzo Kerr put up the other half in 1881. His original tenant was DeWitt C. Dalrymple's store, whose wares included corsets, men's straw hats, lace curtains, feathers, and parasols. (Ten years later, Mr. Dalrymple was yardmaster of a Hoboken railyard and was run over by a train). The current owner is Jill Kearney, who also owns FiNNBAR. Although she is the founder and executive director of ArtYard, these are her personal holdings. —Rick Epstein



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