

Council Meeting

Council Chamber, Smyrna Town Hall
27 S. Market Street Plaza, Smyrna, Delaware
January 20, 2026 – 7:00 PM

Agenda

1. 7:00 PM – Call to order of the regular meeting

The meeting was called to order at 6:59 PM by Mayor Gott.

2. Pledge of Allegiance

There was the Pledge of Allegiance, followed by a moment of silence.

3. Roll Call

Councilmembers present: Mayor Gott, Council Treasurer Johnson, Councilman Miles, Councilman Olson, Council Secretary Pope, and Vice Mayor Dr. Upshur.

Councilmembers absent: Councilman Drew Jr.

4. Additions/deletions to the published agenda

Vice Mayor Dr. Upshur motioned to approve the published agenda. Councilman Johnson seconded the motion. All were in favor. Motion passed.

5. Consent agenda

- a. Council meeting minutes from 12/15/2025

This was skipped over and then addressed after #6. Councilman Johnson motioned to approve. Councilman Miles seconded. All were in favor.

6. Non-agenda items

- a. Mayor and Council Members

Mayor Gott – Thanked everyone who joined the Townhall discussion.

Vice Mayor Dr. Upshur – Spoke about the Townhall discussion and thanked those who came out.

Councilman Pope – Spoke about a virtual meeting he joined in with DEMEC about some upcoming legislative updates. Talked briefly about the Townhall discussion.

Councilman Johnson – Wished everyone a happy new year and hopes that this is another good , successful, year. Wished the town staff who will be out in the weather this coming weekend luck and to be safe.

Councilman Olson – Spoke on the Christmas event held by Friends of Belmont Hall. They highlighted the historic heritage of Smyrna.

Councilman Miles – Wished everyone a happy new year.

b. Police Chief

Chief Donner spoke after Town Manager James. He talked about the annual report and the annual response to resistance report. Use of force is down, complaints overall are up, mainly in domestics, and major crimes is down. Property checks are up and they are more visible.

c. Town Manager

Mayor Gott had Town Manager James speak first. He talked about the Manager’s report, some possible changes with the structure of the Council meetings, and his appreciation to staff. He spoke about the upcoming winter weather and that it’s being monitored.

Mayor Gott wrapped up by talking about the Red Sand Project. It was successful and she encouraged those to mark their calendar for next year when that date is publicized. On January 28th, at the Police Dept., from 6:00 PM to 8:00 PM, there will be a Red Sand Human Trafficking Townhall hosted by DATAC, [Delaware Anti-Trafficking Action Council].

Councilman Pope asked to have a motion for the 12/15/2025 meeting meetings. Councilman Johnson motioned to approve the minutes. Councilman Miles seconded. All were in favor. Motion passed.

7. Old business, including discussion and possible action on the following items:

a. N/A

8. New business, including discussion and possible action on the following items:

a. Set time and place for the April 28, 2026, Town of Smyrna election

Mayor Gott stated that this election will be for Vice Mayor Dr. Upshur’s position, District 2, and Councilman Miles position, At-Large. She confirmed with the Town Manager if this will be held at Town Hall. It will be.

Councilman Olson motioned to approve the place for the election. Councilman Johnson seconded. All were in favor.

Recorder, Danielle Pope, asked what the time frame would be and advised that last year it was 7:00 AM to 8:00 PM.

Councilman Johnson motioned to keep the same time. Councilman Olson seconded. All were in favor.

- b. Election Board members – 5 members and 2 alternates

Mayor Gott said that she hasn't heard back from two of the members but plans to keep the Board the same.

- c. Review and approval of the Downtown Development District Master Plan and 5-years Renewal

This was presented by Town Planner, Jeremy Rothwell, from about 7:12 PM to about 7:41 PM. Below is a summary of the presentation.

1. Background & Purpose of the DDD Program

- Created by the State of Delaware in 2014 to promote redevelopment in downtown commercial and residential areas.
- Smyrna was designated in 2016.
- The designation lasts 10 years with optional 5-year renewals; Smyrna is currently applying for its first 5-year renewal.
- A new plan is required based on updated 2019 state requirements.

2. Required Elements for Renewal

The plan must:

- Evaluate whether boundaries should expand.
- Assess program utilization and effectiveness.
- Update demographic data, maps, and goals.
- Revise incentives and identify “key priority projects.”

A 5-member steering committee helped complete the updated plan.

3. Boundary Updates

- Smyrna’s DDD is currently ~187 acres; allowed maximum is 200 acres.
- The committee recommended adding ~11 acres along W. Commerce St.
- With the addition, the district reaches ~198 acres.

4. How the DDD Incentive Program Works

Small Projects

- Projects \$25,000–\$350,000; rolling applications.
- State reimburses 20% of qualified construction costs.

Large Projects

- Must apply annually and before completing 15% of work.

Eligible Applicants

Property owners, tenants, developers, investors, residential owners, and churches.

5. Program Impact Since 2016

- **43 projects completed**, receiving a total of **\$1.4M in state funding**.
- Types of projects:
 - New dwellings (largest total category).
 - Residential renovations.
 - Tenant fit-outs (e.g., Bay Bird Orthodontics).
 - Church rehabilitations (e.g., Mount Olive).
 - Facade improvements and major commercial rehabs.

Large projects include:

- Dairy Sweet redevelopment (largest single project).
- Smile Place renovation (\$1.7M).

6. Local Incentives Offered by the Town

- Permit fee waivers for projects >\$25,000.
- Tax reassessment waivers (limited use).
- Impact fee waivers for new construction.

- Business license fee waivers (rare).
- Utility rebates.
- Town has provided \$108,000+ in incentives overall.

7. Façade Improvement & Loan Programs

- Town offers façade grants:
 - Up to \$2,500 for residential
 - Up to \$10,000 for commercial
- **94 façade grants** totaling **\$405,000** since 2015.
- Revolving loan fund (USDA-funded) has supported 5 businesses.

8. Additional Funding: ARPA Grants

- Smyrna allocated ~\$416,000 for commercial façade improvements using ARPA funds—unique in Delaware.

9. Demographics & Data Findings

Using two census blocks that cover the DDD area:

- Unemployment is higher; median household income is lower than town-wide averages.
- Educational attainment is lower.
- Most housing is older; 50% built before 1940.
- Rent rates are similar to the rest of town.

10. Key Priority Projects Identified

Eight projects were prioritized to strengthen competitiveness for state funding, including:

- Harris Manufacturing (largest vacant building).
- 129 N Union St (Ducks Unlimited-owned).
- Smyrna Sporting Goods & nearby 6 S Main St.
- 1 N Main St apartments restoration.
- 19 W Commerce St (former restaurant site).
- Howard’s Amusements.
- 10 N Delaware (vacant historic residential).

11. Vision & Goals

- Vision: A revitalized, historic downtown where people of all ages, incomes, and backgrounds can work, shop, live, and play.
- Strategies include zoning updates (e.g., restricting vape/tobacco shops), historic preservation, streetscape improvements, and addressing parking challenges.

- d. Resolution 001-26 approving the Downtown Development District Master Plan and 5-Year Renewal

Councilman Johnson motioned to approve Resolution 001-26. Councilman Pope seconded. There was no discussion. All were in favor.

9. Presentation and public comments (3 minutes)

The meeting was open to public comment at 7:41 PM.

Dave Mast – Spoke to Town Manager James and hoped that Mr. James’ promise to devote his time and effort isn’t affected by his position. He spoke to Chief Donner and wanted to commend the officers for being in the 25 mph zones, watching lights and stop signs, and enforcing the street sweeping ordinance. He said that the fire lanes still need attention. He spoke on the loss of Cpl Snook and understands that that is felt by all in law enforcement. Mr. Mast then spoke on the letter he wrote 8 months ago, the discussion about it 2 months ago on Council floor, and still not receiving a response. He mentioned that they need to be aware of the lumber yards, [apartments/townhomes], being built off N. High St and the potential problems those are

bringing. He hopes that those residents are being told they will be living on top of a former hazardous waste site.

Ruth Bower – She was part of the Downtown Development District steering committee, and she wanted to speak on the job that Jeremy did. She said that he worked many hours, was patient, hand delivered packets and was inclusive of everyone’s ideas and thoughts in preparing the presentation. She knows it was a lot and wanted to recognize him for the work.

10. Adjournment

Councilman Johnson motioned to adjourn. Councilman Olson seconded. All were in favor. Motion passed. Meeting adjourned at 7:44 PM.

Posted 1/13/2025 by 4:30 PM (#1)

NOTE: This agenda, as listed, may not be considered in sequence. This agenda is subject to change to include additional items, including Executive Sessions, and/or deletion of items, including Executive Sessions that arise at time of meeting.