



CITY OF ABSECON
Municipal Complex
500 Mill Road
Absecon, New Jersey 08201

Carie A. Crone, RMC
Municipal Clerk

Phone (609) 641-0663x101
Fax (609) 645-5098

CITY COUNCIL

JANUARY 21, 2021

REGULAR MEETING MINUTES

The meeting was called to order by Council President, Bennett at 5:30 p.m.

FLAG SALUTE

INVOCATION – Father Cosme, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Church

STATEMENT OF THE SUNSHINE LAW
NOTIFICATION THAT THIS MEETING IS ELECTRONICALLY RECORDED

ROLL CALL

PRESENT: Burroughs, Cain, Cavileer, Howell, Light (by zoom), Bennett

ABSENT:

ALSO PRESENT: Mayor Horton, Fred Scerni, Jessica Thompson, Carie Crone

PRESENTATION – JOHN DERITIS –MAYOR HORTON

Kim – she read part of a letter from a resident first then she read a statement on John's accomplishments during his 21 years of service. He actually retired last February, but because of Covid, it was delayed.

John – he can't thank everyone enough. He loved being a fireman and then becoming officer and then the Chief. He looks forward to being active again on the fire department. He thanked members of his family who were present, as well as friends.

NOMINATION TO FILL THE VACANCY OF COUNCILMAN FRANK PHILLIPS

Keith – thanked Frank for his many years of service to the City and your work was not unnoticed. He then read a letter from the Municipal Leader for the Absecon Republican Municipal Committee, Rodney Ruark submitting three names for the vacant position of the Ward I spot. They were: Greg Seher, Melissa Phillips and Nick Larotonda.

Nomination was made for Nick Larotonda by Councilwoman Howell – second - Councilwoman Cain
No other nominations were given.

ROLL CALL: Burroughs, yes; Cain, yes; Cavileer, yes; Howell, yes; Light, yes; Bennett, yes

24 Filling the vacant Councilperson, Ward 1 position.

Motion for Resolution #24 was made by Councilman Cavileer – second – Councilman Light
ROLL CALL: Burroughs, yes; Cain, yes; Cavileer, yes; Howell, yes; Light, yes; Bennett, yes

ADMINISTRATION OF OATH OF OFFICE

Commissioner Amy Gatto administered the oath of office to Nick.

2021 ORDINANCES

01 Amending the Code of the City of Absecon, Chapter 224 – Land Use and Development, Article XXIII – Signs.

Motion for first reading and introduction – Councilwoman Cain – second – Councilman Burroughs

Keith – this update came to us from the Planning Board and it's long overdue. We are trying to be business friendly and attract businesses. There were a couple of issues, but the Planning Board looked into and got the job done and presented us with this updated ordinance. It's a lot of work from the Board and the Construction Office, as well and thanked them and who ever was involved in it.

Mayor – she agrees it's a long time coming. We needed this updated and we do want to be business friendly and want them to be able to advertise.

ROLL CALL: Burroughs, yes; Cain, yes; Cavileer, yes; Howell, yes; Larotonda, abstain; Light, yes; Bennett, yes

02 Amending the Code of the City of Absecon, Chapter 35 – Fire Department, §35-6 – Chain of Command

Motion for first reading and introduction – Councilman Burroughs – second – Councilman Cavileer

Keith – this was first brought up when Hamilton Township did it and the fire department has had some communication issues between them and the City. He thought it was a good idea to do this and enabling the chief of police to act as a liaison between the fire department and the city.

Mayor – after the year that we've had, she felt we needed to update the organizations in our emergency management group and our fire department. She felt there was a disconnect with our fire department in City Hall. After talking to Chief Laughlin and him reaching out to Hamilton Township, she is thrilled to have some sort of a solution. She thinks this may work. We can tweak it and do what we need to do with it, but she's hoping organizational and communication comes out.

Keith – this is the introduction only and we can send recommendations back to the Public Safety Committee for any updates before it is brought back.

Betty – wanted to make sure no one is reading into this anymore than what it exactly is. It's just another form of communication between emergency management and the Council and the fire department and the Council. It's not eliminating any other committees; nor interfering with your daily deeds or what you're doing. On the other hand, it will have everyone following the same rules. The majority of the people won't even realize that there's been a change at all.

Nobody wants to take over the fire department or do your job. Everyone appreciates what you do and really want to make it easier for you. We hope this way works. Please listen to what it says and ask questions during the public portion.

Keith – read paragraph A under 35-6 to clarify the Chief's duties.

ROLL CALL: Burroughs, yes; Cain, yes; Cavileer, yes; Howell, yes; Larotonda, abstain; Light, yes; Bennett, yes

REGULAR MEETING AGENDA

2021 RESOLUTIONS

- 25** Authorizing the Mayor to enter into an agreement with Ed & Gene's King Tire, LLC. for the provisions of Fleet Maintenance Services.

Jessica – explained this is our vehicle maintenance contract for two years and that we've used this company for many years now. We always go out to bid every two years for this.

- 26** Authorizing the Tax Collector to Participate in an Electronic Tax Sale.

- 27** Authorizing a fee for the creation, printing and mailing of Tax Sale Notices for an Electronic Tax Sale.

Jessica – we've done it this way for some years now and we don't have a date yet, but we need to set this up at the beginning of the year to prepare.

- 28** Authorizing the submission of the City of Absecon's Tonnage Grant Application for the year 2020 to the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection.

- 29** Permitting a Charitable Organization to solicit fund, namely the Charles A. Hammell Post 28 American Legion.

- 30** Authorizing to cancel taxes on the properties that are exempt from taxes due to Disable Veterans Status.

- 31** Authorizing the Tax Collector to cancel taxes for the 1st and 2nd Quarter of 2021 and to refund the prorated amount of the 4th Quarter of 2020 on the property located at 33 Connecticut Ave. (Blk. 73, Lot 2).

- 32** Authorizing a refund of an overpayment of taxes for the 2nd Quarter of 2020 on the listed property.

- 33** Authorizing a refund of an overpayment of taxes on the property located at 700 Shelburne Ave. (Blk. 145. Lot 18).

- 34** Appointing a Full-Time Dispatcher, namely Joseph Festa.

Jessica - he has been a part time employee and he is filling the full-time vacancy.

PUBLIC PORTION (Agenda Items Only)

Motion to open to the public – Councilwoman Howell – second – Councilman Light
All were in favor.

Jeff Ciccone – 901 New York Ave. – thanked everyone for the firehouse. The project is done and it's very nice and it's the envy of any companies in Atlantic County; thanks for getting it done. He spoke on the ordinance that was introduced regarding the chain of command. If it happens, then we will work together to make it work, but there are some issues you have to think about. There will be another link in the communication chain; J.R. is a good guy, but who knows what happens when he gets replaced. There could be more expenses, because usually you get an increase in salary. The chain of command should be explained a little better. Hamilton Township had to do it because of what Mizpah did fiscally to themselves. We are rated a "3" and only 10% of the country achieves that. We are a good firehouse and are getting new members and more probably now.

Keith – we are not doubting the fire department. You are all a good group. Nobody has ever said anything to that effect.

Betty – so you understand, this is not permanent and we find this doesn't work or if we find J.R. doesn't want the position anymore, it's can be revisited. There is no increase in salary either.

Roy Talley – fire chief – announced they are operating out of the new house since Sunday. He thanked the Mayor for her comments at the opening, which was a soft opening, but because of Covid, we couldn't. He's hoping for a big event in the future. It is a beautiful building and there are some problems, and we are working on getting them done soon. As to the ordinance, he doesn't feel a liaison is necessary if we all sat down and talked. He thinks it still can be done. You're adding another level of isolation between government and the people, you are creating more problems. He knows J.R. for many years and we do get along, but he's not a firefighter. You can't explain something if you don't really know it. We have talk of unity going on and he thinks this is going to cause more dissention. Many guys are concerned and he feels everyone should sit down and discuss things the way people used to, instead of creating an ordinance would be a better way to handle this. The division of fire safety regulates anyone in chain of command and to be in that position, you have to be a firefighter for 3 years and have other schooling to earn certificates. We turn out more members than many other volunteer departments and he'd hate to not be able to get new members if they hear there are problems.

Dale Conover – deputy chief – he's been a firefighter for 40 years. He agrees with everything Roy had said and he really wishes that Council would reconsider the Ordinance. We should just sit down and work out the problems and get things straight. Roy's the 14th chief he's served under and there have been numerous councils and we've always seemed to work out our problems.

Chris Seher – 707 Chelsea Road – regarding Ord. #2, it was said it's not a new position, but just a chain of command change. The police chief has taken on a lot of new work as the chief and then he read from paragraph A1 and how it changes the budget process to go through the police chief instead of directly to City Council. Communicating with each other doesn't mean you have to agree on things and you are abdicating your authority in terms of the budgeting of the fire dept. Communication is a bad excuse and you're putting too much work on the Police Chief. Regarding Ord. #1, the sign ordinance was delayed for some time and it was ready to go months ago. He wanted to know changes were done to it for the reading tonight.

Keith – I can't and if nobody can we will let it out

Mayor – we needed to have Mike O'Hagan, the zoning officer review it and comment on it, since he is the one who enforces it.

Jessica - there were a few clarification issues and Mike had to speak to Rob about them
Sandy – started to read a letter from Mike O'Hagan regarding the sign ordinance and then Chris was given a copy.

Jerry Cohen – 809 Chelsea Road - past chief of fire dept. – he believes with what Mr. Seher has said. Communication really isn't a problem and isn't that the job when the Public Safety meetings are held monthly? When he attended them, if there were issues or problems, they were brought up. Other departments brought up their issues as well. Council committee members were present as well.

Greg Seher – 625 Yarmouth Ave. – congratulated Nick, the new councilmember, who will serve the community well. With regards to the sign ordinance, he was involved with it as a member of the Planning Board and the subcommittee that drafted the ordinance, as well as Betty. They were frustrated that it took this long to get done. There was then discussion on the wayfinding signs for the gun range property and why that held up the ordinance. There are some Master Plan revisions that still should be addressed, specifically parking and certain uses. As to Ord. #2, if there is a problem with communication, why would you add another layer of it. If the issue is not getting along, then call it a buffer or someone to mediate the departments.

Motion to close public – Councilman Cavileer – second – Councilman Burroughs
All were in favor.

CONSENT AGENDA - Resolutions read by title that have been moved to consent.

Motion to move consent agenda – Councilman Light – second – Councilman Burroughs

ROLL CALL: Burroughs, yes; Cain, yes; Cavileer, yes; Howell, yes; Larotonda, abstain; Light, yes; Bennett, yes

APPROVAL OF BILL LIST - \$ 2,114,943.29

Motion to approve – Councilman Cavileer – second – Councilman Burroughs

ROLL CALL: Burroughs, yes; Cain, yes; Cavileer, yes; Howell, yes; Larotonda, abstain; Light, yes; Bennett, yes

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Regular Meeting Minutes – 12/17/2020

Re-Organization Minutes – 1/7/2021

Motion to approve – Councilman Light – second – Councilman Burroughs

ROLL CALL: Burroughs, yes; Cain, yes; Cavileer, yes; Howell, yes; Larotonda, abstain; Light, yes; Bennett, yes

REPORTS

Caleb – Finance - we are looking at having two separate budget meetings in some time in February, separate from the Council meetings. He said there is a new program, with no cost to the city, to streamline the scheduling of road details on County roads. It could help us out and he is looking forward to hearing more about it in the future. He thanked everyone who helped out with the city wide clean up that was held on Monday. There were about 70 participants. Two companies that helped out were College Hunks and kids from about 12 kids from our 8th grade national junior honor society members helped out. He thanked Bob Battista, our Recycling Coordinator, for working with us that day and getting ACUA to help out as well.

Steve – Parks & Playgrounds – he's been in contact with Pete Higbee regarding the bands for the concerts this year and will be selecting soon. ASAC registration is open for baseball and softball.

Jessica – announced that City Hall is open now

Keith – announced the Council meeting are now starting at 5:30 p.m.

MONTHLY REPORTS – Carie

Construction - \$6,139.00

Tax Collection - \$1,021,793.47

Municipal Court - \$3,188.27

Municipal Clerk - \$2,195.00

Mayor – she recognized Rick Williams for the time he served on the Library Board. He did an excellent job. He will be missed. Also thanked him for the years he kept the community informed by putting the notices on the Legion Board. She thanked Caleb for his work in setting up the clean up day.

PUBLIC PORTION

Motion to open to the public – Councilwoman Howell – second – Councilman Cavileer
All were in favor.

Chris Seher – 701 Chelsea Road – he has asked in 2020 what the carry-over figure was for 2019 and never got a number. He asked what it was, because that can be used towards the 2021 budget formulation.

Jessica - \$469,000

Chris – the walkway at Heritage Park looks fantastic. He thinks there could be a safety issue. We removed the dirt and bush type growth and now the water comes up to the bulkhead. Kids tend to run in front of their parents and they are attracted to water. We've created an attraction and they could trip or fall into the water, so he suggested some kind of additional screening. He thanked Council for changing the meeting times to 5:30 p.m. It's a step, but a compromise between 7 and 5 would have been 6:00 p.m. On today's website, it says the meetings can be watched live on ABTV Ch. 97. If that's not happening, then you should take that down. We paid for equipment years ago that had that capability and now we aren't going to do it? There should be some type of modification to it so it can be done. Regarding the transit village, if the area is already zoned for it and nothing is being changed with that, why is it being applied for? Our ordinance says it permits it, but to proactively change the ordinance, then you are promoting it. The language in the criteria for the application is promote, support and demonstrate willingness for high density residential. Our student numbers have gone up 10% since the new apartments have opened up. We created the capability of polling on our website, so maybe we should do that.

Roy Talley – fire chief – forgot to report that Engine 84, the first run piece of apparatus was out of service for 3 weeks. The bill could possibly be around \$5,000.

Motion to close public – Councilman Burroughs - second – Councilman Cavileer
All were in favor.

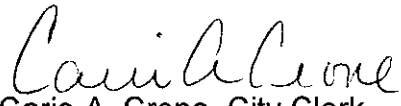
Keith - asked Jim Eberwine, who was in the audience, if he had anything to announce.

Jim – nothing really new. Just staying on top of the Covid situation. So far in Absecon there were 33 deaths as a result. The case count is around 802 for us. They have a meeting next Thursday with the County. He will be putting the weather on the website soon. We might have snow in about 10 days.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion to adjourn – Councilman Burroughs – second – Councilwoman Cain
All were in favor.

Respectfully submitted,


Carie A. Crone, City Clerk

Approved: 2-4-21