



CITY OF ABSECON
Municipal Complex
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CITY COUNCIL

MARCH 4, 2021

REGULAR MEETING MINUTES

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

FLAG SALUTE

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

ROLL CALL

PRESENT: Burroughs, Cain, Cavileer, Howell, Larotonda, Light, Bennett

ABSENT:

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

2021 ORDINANCES FOR INTRODUCTION

- 06** Amending the Code of the City of Absecon Chapter 224, Land Use and Development, Article XXXV-Stormwater Control.

Motion for introduction – Councilman Larotonda – second – Councilman Burroughs

All were in favor.

Eddie – explained the State regulations related to stormwater management that are applicable to municipalities and they deal mainly with private development and if someone comes in to develop a vacant piece of land, they need to install drainage basins, pipes and the like. Fifteen years ago, the state required all towns to follow certain regulations. The DEP has updated the regulations and a new ordinance needs to be adopted by us. It's very similar to the prior one, except for some "green" type methods. They are trying to be more environmentally friendly.

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

2021 ORDINANCES FOR ADOPTION

- 04** An Ordinance to exceed the Municipal Budget Appropriation Limits and to establish a Cap Bank (N.J.S.A. 40A-45.14).

Motion for second reading – Councilman Light - second – Councilman Burroughs

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

Motion to open to the public – Councilman Light – second – Councilman Larotonda

All were in favor

Jessica – explained we do this cap bank ordinance every year to establish the cap for the budget

Motion to close public – Councilman Burroughs – second – Councilman Larotonda

All were in favor.

Motion for final reading and adoption – Councilman Burroughs – second – Councilwoman Howell

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

- 05** An Ordinance establishing salary ranges for the City of Absecon.

Motion for second reading - Councilman Light - second – Councilwoman Cain

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

Jessica – explained two positions needed changes: a new seasonal public works employee to be added soon and the Police Chief's due to contract that was entered into last year.

Motion to open to the public – Councilman Light – second – Councilman Burroughs

All were in favor

Motion to close public – Councilman Light – second – Councilman Burroughs

All were in favor.

Motion for final reading and adoption – Councilman Light – second – Councilman Burroughs

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

2021 RESOLUTIONS

- 47** Amending Resolution #03 & #41-2021, confirming meetings of City Committees, Commissions and Boards for the year 2021.

PULLED – not happening now. The meeting time is not changing.

- 48** Authorizing the Mayor and other City Officials to execute a 2021 Safety Contract with the Atlantic County Municipal Joint Insurance Fund.

Jessica – we do this every year

- 49** Appointing a Full Time Patrol Officer, namely Da'Zhon Bethea.

Chief – this hire replaces an open spot that has been prolonged because of COVID. Mr. Bethea grew up in Jersey City and currently resides in the Galloway/Egg Harbor City area and is a graduate of Rutgers.

- 50** Accepting a Volunteer Firefighter into the Absecon City Fire Department, namely James Watts.

- 51** Authorizing the Mayor to enter into an agreement with a third-party company for off-duty police detail administration.

Keith – this is the ordinance that we passed for the service to schedule details for the officers and free up manpower in our office. There is no cost to us.

- 52** Authorizing the submission of an application for Grant Funding and the execution of a Grant Contract with the New Jersey Department of Transportation for the Central Business District Streetscape – Phase 4.

Eddie – we submitted a grant in 2020 and it was denied, so this was discussed with the new developer and a commitment was made for us to try our best efforts to secure funding for that work and we are trying again this year under discretionary aid.

- 53** Authorizing the release of a Maintenance Guarantee posted by Range 129, LLC.

- 54** Authorizing the City Clerk to issue Boat Ramp Permits to local marinas.

- 55** Authorizing 2021 salaries for non-union employees.

Jessica – this covers all employees not covered under a bargaining agreement for a 2% increase in 2021.

- 56** Authorizing the Mayor to sign a Collective Bargaining Agreement between the City of Absecon and the Government Workers Union.

Jessica – this union has two sections and this is the white-collar section of it. There are only a handful of employees in it and this includes the 2% increase in it.

- 57** Authorizing to increase the Deferred Local School Tax.

Jessica – this allows us to adjust our reserve to free up some surplus funds, which will assist with balancing our budget and the amount is \$800,000. This does not affect the school in any way.

- 58** Authorizing the Self-Examination of the 2021 Budget.

Jessica – every three years the State does a review and the other two years we do our own.

- 59** Authorizing the Introduction of the 2021 Municipal Budget.

Caleb – highlighted some of the 2021 budget, which is \$12,049,600.00 and the tax increase will be 1.5 cents. It comes out to \$107,034, which is offsetting the pension increase of \$107,552. Revenues decreased substantially in 2020 as a result of the pandemic. The deficit was \$156,706.00 and we anticipate 2021 to be lower as well. Due to school budget increases for the past years, we were able to adjust the school tax reserve to free up some surplus funds to assist with balancing the budget this year. The budget is utilizing an unprecedented \$1.5 million of surplus to balance it. The city hasn't received any increase in State Aid for almost ten years. The city continues to create a conservative budget plan in order to stay financially responsible and be able to withstand unknown circumstances. The tax cap is under by \$332,020 and the appropriation cap is under \$343,013, far below the amounts we are able to raise by taxation and spend. The highlights of the 2021 budget are:

1. Continuation of all personnel and services, including the recent addition of police and dispatch personnel and an addition of a season public works position
2. The purchase of a Pierce multi-use fire truck
3. Two police vehicles and updated body worn cameras
4. The full road program is returning
5. Dredging project permitting and analysis (phase 2)
6. Shore Road project in conjunction with the County to alleviate flooding

7. Traffic light control for public safety
8. New City entrance signs

Caleb and Keith thanked Jessica for the work on the budget.

Councilman Larotonda asked for Res. #59 be pulled from the Consent Agenda for separate discussion and vote.

Motion was made by Councilman Larotonda – second – Councilwoman Howell

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

PUBLIC PORTION (Agenda Items Only)

Motion to open to the public – Councilman Light – second – Councilwoman Howell

All were in favor.

Charles Urban – 35 E. Faunce Landing Road – he's a hospitality worker in AC and his wife is a school teacher. Last year was tough for him and a lot of others being out of work and even when they were able to open at 25% it didn't help much. He's asking Council to really look at the budget, like they had to do when he was on Council about 10 years ago when the economy was really bad. People are hurting all over. If there is a surplus for a rainy day, well this year was a monsoon. He's asking to give the taxpayers a break this year. We have all had to tighten our budgets at home and hopefully the City can do the same.

John Rankowitz – 1106 DelMar Court – he asked for a more detailed explanation of the deferred school tax and the need for it. He knows the school tax levy is about \$12 million and has been for about the last few years.

Jessica – it's being increased by \$800,000 and there needs to be a reserve of at least 50% of the school budget, but we are trying to be a little creative because we have a revenue problem and we don't need to reserve quite as much as the 50%. By moving some of the funds from that reserve, we are able to increase our surplus, not by real revenue, but enough to balance our budget. Our revenue was reduced this year and if we don't do an action such as this, we could be talking about a higher tax increase. These are funds collected ahead of the time before they are due to the school. We operate on a calendar year and the school on a fiscal year.

Chris Seher – 707 Chelsea Road – had some questions regarding the deferred school funds. Asked if the ending balance of \$2,972,000 going into the 2021 budget calculation includes the \$800,000. Where is the balance of the money?

Jessica – said it does include it and the balance is in the cash reserve as part of the general ledger.

Chris – so the current fund balance will now contain \$800,000 that really was collected for school tax. He heard that revenue was down significantly and are we talking about \$156,000? Is that drastically and horribly? That's about 8% of the approximately \$2,000,000 raised other than taxes. As of February, the remaining balance in the 2020 budget is \$671,000. Revenue went down \$156,000, but expenses went down by \$827,000. We know now the number starting in 2020 was about \$650,000 and the number at the end of 2020 was about \$450,000. He suggested taking the \$100,000 out of the fund balance and still keep a balance in it. He feels there are certain line items that could be reduced to find the \$100,000 as well.

Greg Seher – 625 Yarmouth Avenue – clarified a statement regarding the deferred school funds and how it's able to be done. Regarding the tax increase in general, this is one of the most economically depressed areas of the country and people are hurting. Feels Council should cut the budget a little more.

Rich DeRose (Zoom attendant) – **43 Natalie Terrace** – were there any identified cuts to the budget? If so, what were they and if not, why?

Keith – there were some cuts in insurance, information technology, the library and our debt service went down \$249,000.

Rich – families across Absecon are making tough choices day in and day out and asked Council can find cuts so they don't have to cut anymore.

Keith – thank you Mr. DeRose and he shares his sentiments as well and we all have. Nobody likes to raise taxes. He believes the tax raise last year started at 2.3 cents and through tightening got it down to 1.7 cents. Nobody knew last year what was going to happen this year. It's important for everyone to have an excess what Chris calls that "slush fund". You never know what you will need the extra money for.

Chris Seher – questioned the two lots that have been subdivided already that should be put up for sale again. It could make up the tax increase, but now you want to put in the budget \$65,000 to have the engineers subdivide another area of town. You could table that this year and there is 1 cent.

Councilman Light – he explained his last year of work and he understands, but he is trying to be compassionate towards the residents.

Greg Seher – just confirmed that the police program for details was at no charge to us.

Keith – yes, the company pays for it

Motion to close public – Councilman Larotonda - second – Councilwoman Cain
All were in favor.

CONSENT AGENDA - Resolutions were read again.

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

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

#59 Authorizing the Introduction of the 2021 Municipal Budget.

Motion to approve – Councilman Cavileer – second – Councilman Burroughs

ROLL CALL: Burroughs, yes; Cain, yes; Cavileer, yes; Howell, yes; Larotonda, yes, suggested amendments be made; Light, yes; Bennett, yes; prior to the passing of the budget, we will have further discussion of it.

APPROVAL OF BILL LIST - \$534,831.28

Motion to approve – Councilman Light – second – Councilman Larotonda

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

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Regular Meeting Minutes – 2/04/2021

Regular Meeting Minutes – 2/18/2021

Budget Meeting Minutes – 2/11/2021

Betty – had a question on the 2/4 minutes and what she said

Motion to approve as amended – Councilman Larotonda – second – Councilman Cavileer

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

REPORTS

Eddie – he gave a brief update of projects that he is working on. The 2021 road program; wrapping up the 2020 projects and all is moving along as scheduled. The punch list is close to being completed on the firehouse.

He handed out a layout plan that was presented about 15 years ago of a potential New York Avenue major subdivision. It's listed in the budget as engineering, planning and surveying costs to do the subdivision. It's actually one of the first projects that he worked on when he got here. It was brought up in the past few months and thought it was a good time to bring it back since the housing market is getting better and the high school situation could be changing. There has been \$65,000 put in the budget for this, however he pointed out that if each of these lots were to sell at roughly \$70,000, which is what we were looking at for the other two lots; the city would make over \$1,000,000. These are estimates, but he feels it's more of an investment than an expense because it's an investment in the future of the community. We wanted to present it tonight and if anyone is interesting in building a home, to be aware of it. He was asked by Keith to give a brief presentation on it. The lots would conform to the 10,000 sq. ft requirement and believes they will be 100 ft. wide and 100 ft. deep.

Steve – asked if there was any more city owned land that could be added to this piece

Eddie – he believes there could be more. We can take a look at it and reconfigure it.

Nick – questioned the vacant lot at the end of Road A

Eddie – at the time it was a retention pond and the big lot in between Road A and 15th St. is another basin. All of that will have to be redesigned because the rules have changed twice since then.

Jessica – the Spring leaf pickup will run from April 12th through May 7th

Mayor – SJ Gas wants to remind residents about safe digging practices and damage prevention public awareness. You need to call 811 before any digging projects, whether commercial or residential. Thanked Steve for making sure the ambulance squad had lights installed at their parking lot. The fireplace at the Legion has had a makeover and he was instrumental to making that happen as well. Also thanked Katie McCabe and her group to help our educators and seniors in getting vaccinated. Betty and Sandy have helped in that as well for our seniors.

Steve – Parks & Playgrounds – they have discussed batting cages to be built and installed and the total amount to complete them is \$8,500 and they have raised \$4,500, which is what they need to place the order. It takes 3-4 weeks for the material to come in and then the installer said he'd try to do it as quick as he can.

Keith – went by Morton Avenue and the flag pole that had been leaning is now down.

Caleb – spoke about the Absecon monopoly rocks game. They are randomly hidden in public spaces all over town to encourage families to get out and do something together and safely. All instructions are listed on the Community Affairs Facebook page.

PUBLIC PORTION

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

Alex Corkhill – 236A Upland Ave. – thanked council for their hard work and beautifying Absecon. He thinks the subdivision is a great idea and hopefully there will be restrictions as to size of the homes to conform with the area. He spoke on behalf of the lacrosse group (Absecon Tomahawks), which will be starting up and just found out, that the field they were supposed to be on well over five years ago, is shut down again. It's appalling and absurd that we can't get that field right. He doesn't know what is happening with it and has no information.

Eddie – that contract is closed out and he hasn't heard anything about it lately. He did a remediation of it for the drainage.

Keith – it is only dirt. The biggest regret was not pushing for turf.

Alex – tired of putting a band aid on it. We have nothing to offer the kids to play. Covid cancelled 2020, but 2019 was unplayable too. We were able to play at Holy Spirit for home games and their fields are hurting too. Council needs to be accountable and it can't be kicked to a committee. If the drainage was cleared up and it works, then who is accountable for these fields? Who dropped the ball on this? It seems like we are catering now for fields for individual teams. How come other cities don't have an issue with having their fields used for multi sports? There's no communication between the athletic director and the Tomahawks. Why should we have to keep traveling to outside fields to play?

Keith – we have public works that works on the fields, as well as a separate contractor for seeding and fertilizing them. The recreation director is supposed to be scheduling the field use.

Steve – he said that if it is played on now, it won't come back. He doesn't know what happened. He wasn't on council when it was decided to put a new field in, but he would have voted to get the turf field, even if it cost more. He asked about the school fields.

Alex – they are in rough spot as well. He hasn't spoken to the superintendent, but he heard that the Marsh field is only available for practice. They're starting a field hockey team and want to get that field ready for the Fall. The Attales field was in bad shape, but we used it for practice. Knowing we were to have our home games at the football field, we didn't worry about it.

Keith – when he heard that they weren't going to be able to play on the school fields, he called the Greater Egg Harbor Regional district. Galloway kids play on our team, since they folded their team. He asked if we could play at one of the fields at Absegami for home games. The superintendent was on board and he was put in contact with the head of the Tomahawks. It's been three days and there's been no communication, I guess. He was led to believe you were going to be able to use our football field.

Chief Laughlin – he said his child played football and lacrosse in Galloway and Mays Landing and they never played on a football field. The teams had their separate areas. Unfortunately, our field is never going to be able to be played on this year because it was used through December and it has to be seeded and fertilized and it needs to take.

Steve – Holy Spirit resods in certain areas

Alex – he thinks it's a cop out to say only one team can use it. We were told we could move other there. We don't play when it rains or in bad weather. You're going to seed it and it will look good and then football will play on it and it will be ruined again. It's a vicious cycle. He knows it's difficult times, but he thinks that the direction this town is going, we need to buck up and do something for these kids and have them have a safe environment for them to play on. You have to put a turf field in play and then you can then have multiple sports be able play on it. The city can make money doing it too by having all our teams play on it, then other organizations will pay to come and play on it since there are lights on it. The Prep makes thousands of dollars doing it. We need to find money to do this. It has to be addressed and he's tired of people passing the buck. Council and committees talk, but nobody does anything. There are no doers. It's sad that we have the most successful program in a short period of time. They play well and we have great leadership and it's the fastest growing sport in America today.

Sandy – brought up the field at Franklin Ave at least for practices, but Alex said it's too small for the games. There's also another field at Arthur Rand in Galloway that she brought up as a possibility.

Alex – why do we have to go that route? Why do we have to continually search outside of our realm? He's done getting bounced around and he's talked to many people here at the different committee meetings and he's frustrated. Being on council, you should be frustrated as well. The majority have had kids play sports. It's the job of a leader to leave your program better than when you received it. Shouldn't Council feel that too; when it's time to step down, you should say "did I leave this job better than when I got here"? It should be yes. We need to find money in the budget.

Chris Seher – asked Eddie about the subdivision plan and what the dark green meant. Why wouldn't we continue all the way out to the street instead of a cul de sac? Maybe even a lot or two more?

Eddie – cul de sacs are more desirable neighborhoods and you may get a better return on your investment. We are going back to the drawing board and maybe things have changed in 15 years.

Chris – do you have to deal with the storm water by having a basin now?

Eddie – when anyone creates a major development, which is an acre or more, or ¼ of an acre of new impervious surface, you fall under the State's storm water regulations. He then explained how it works and that components have changed over the years. An underground drainage system would depend on the amount of impervious coverage you are creating. When Katie Court did theirs, they didn't have to deal with water quality, so they could discharge directly into the ground. If we did all underground, we would need to pretreat the water and he explained. We won't rule it out.

Steve – asked Eddie to do a plan that shows it cutting through

Greg Seher – he feels it's better to not have cul de sacs and have more access in and out. Thanked all those who are involved in our court running efficiently and in other departments as well.

Mentioned the gas station on Route 30 where the canopy fell over and that it has been removed finally and thanked whoever was involved in getting that cleaned up. There was discussion of the Memorial Day parade at the last meeting. Are they not allowed?

Kim – it's the amount of people in the parade and the spectators. We are trying to work it out.

Greg – hopefully it can happen. With the new marijuana laws being passed, there is a part regarding minors saying the police don't have to notify the parents. He feels that's a problem and he understands that we can't change the State regulations, but maybe we could circumvent it by having curfew laws and public intoxication laws in the city. Whatever the City can do. He knows the Mill Road and Route 30 intersection is not completed yet, but driving it every day, he is concerned about the configuration of the lanes and wondered if there is going to be more done.

Chief Laughlin – he spoke to the State and they are going to paint it with brighter paint, but it has to be warmer out for the paint. That's why they added extra signage. He told they needed to add more arrows on the lanes starting down near New Jersey Avenue as you enter them, so you know you are in the right lane.

Motion to close public – Councilman Light - second – Councilman Larotonda
All were in favor.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion to adjourn – Councilman Cavileer – second – Councilwoman Howell
All were in favor.

Respectfully submitted,


Carrie A. Crone, City Clerk

Approved: 3-18-21