



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

BUDGET MEETING

JANUARY 23RD, 2025 6:30 PM

MINUTES

FLAG SALUTE – Mayor

ROLL CALL

PRESENT: Councilmembers Alex Clark, Linda Evans, Steve Light, Christine Parker, Mike Sykes, and Council President Richard DeRose

ABSENT: Councilman Nick LaRotonda

ALSO PRESENT: Mayor Thomas Marrone, City Engineer Ed Dennis, City Clerk Carie Crone, Police Chief J.R. Laughlin

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

WORK MEETING AGENDA

2025 MUNICIPAL BUDGET DISCUSSION

Council President DeRose: Proposed the following budget timeline: March 6th – Introduction; March 20th – Public Hearing; April 3rd – Adoption.

ENGINEERING

Ed Dennis: Explained Engineering Capital Projects and yearly Wishlist. Presented the City's Infrastructure Projects. The material provided to Council details each project with a brief description.

1. 2025 Road Program: Includes construction & inspection costs. At the next Public Works Committee Meeting, they will begin discussing the 2025 Road Program. In possession of NJDOT Municipal Aid funding. Roadway and drainage improvements are planned including Delaware Avenue from New Road to Huron Avenue.
2. 2026 Road Program: The 2025 budget includes the engineering for the 2026 Road Program. Explained that if the City waited to start the engineering process until after the entire budget process was complete, it would significantly delay the project's completion for that year. By budgeting the project's engineering in the year prior, it allows the City to begin the engineering work early in the year.

3. Shore Road Flood Mitigation Roadway Improvements: Includes construction phase engineering costs for improvements to Shore Road from Illinois Ave. to north of Ohio Ave. Improvements will include the raising of the road to match higher elevations. The County is funding 100% of construction costs. Recently met with the County Engineer who promised to expedite the project.
4. Crestview Avenue Pedestrian Safety Improvements – Phase 2: Includes construction of an asphalt pedestrian path connecting new sidewalk on Crestview Ave. to existing Pitney Park trail. Project will use NJDOT Safe Streets to Transit grant to cover all costs.
5. Pedestrian Crosswalk Safety Improvements: Includes the installation of raised pedestrian crosswalks, curb ramps, and drainage improvements at various locations throughout the City. Funding will be provided by NJDOT Safe Streets to Transit grant, so the City will only be responsible for engineering costs.
6. Faunce Landing Road Shared Use Path (Wishlist Item): Includes pedestrian and bicycle safety improvements. Improvements consist of an off-street shared use path along Faunce Landing and enhanced on-street bicycle facilities on Lisbon Avenue. Would only do project if received grant.
7. FY2026 NJIB Stormwater Management Improvements: Because the City is now Tier III, major stormwater improvements are eligible to be funded through the New Jersey Infrastructure Bank (NJIB) (up to \$2M with 100% principal interest in FY2026).
8. Hobart Avenue Drainage Improvements – Phase 2: Includes the reconstruction of drainage facilities in easement between Hobart Ave. and Amy Lane in order to increase drainage capacity for surrounding area. Additional improvements to be determined. The only costs for drainage projects under the NJIB would be Bond Counsel.
9. Absecon Estates Drainage Improvements: Includes the reconstruction of drainage facilities in Absecon Estates and contributing drainage area in order to increase drainage capacity. The scope of improvements to be determined based on drainage project currently in progress. The only costs for drainage projects under the NJIB would be Bond Counsel.
10. Heritage Park Restroom Building: Includes the construction of an ADA-compliant restroom building in Heritage Park. Construction would include a new building structure, plumbing, electric, and heating. Water/sewer services were previously installed.
11. City Hall Accessible Ramp: Includes construction of ADA-compliant accessibility ramp at back entrance/exit of municipal building. Plans include alternate bid to reconstruct existing steps and lighting improvements. Suggested they include the additional price of new front and back doors within the project's budget.
12. City Hall Restroom Renovations: Includes renovations to the existing public restrooms at City Hall to modernize and improve accessibility. Suggested that the City apply for a grant to do this project.

Councilman Light: Suggested that the City prioritize work on the back entrance/exit so there is at least one entrance that is ADA-compliant. Cautioned Council about the liability of its current status.

Council President DeRose: Warned Council (the newest Councilmembers in particular) that due to necessary action last year and this year, City taxes will need to be raised significantly. Emphasized the necessity of raising taxes in order to solve problems. Regarding the budget process, clarified

that there are (1) wishes, (2) wants, and (3) absolute needs. Opined that this item is a “really want, not an absolute need.” Noted that the item is a liability, however, pointed out that there are other City liabilities. Mentioned other ADA-compliant features which exist in Heritage Park (i.e. ADA-compliant restroom). Supports fixing the lighting issue.

Councilman Clark: Suggested during this Budget Meeting, they listen to E. Dennis’ presentation, and then at the next Budget Meeting, Council can discuss which items they choose to prioritize.

E. Dennis: Reminded Council that, in regard to item #11, the City already has a grant in progress.

13. Crestview Avenue Parking Improvements: Item ideated during the Sidewalk Project on Crestview Avenue, but was too big of an undertaking to add. Could possibly include as part of the Road Program. Explained that the area is located along the soccer fields. Roots are currently destroying the current parking spaces. This project would reconstruct the whole parking area. This project would include tree removal and replacement.

Councilman Sykes: Asked whether the area includes that near the playground.

E. Dennis: No, as that area has recently ben repaved.

14. Pitney Park Batting Cage Enclosure: Item is currently in progress for a grant application. The City has been successful in the past two years for getting this recreation grant. The grant would not fully cover the project. The estimated costs include the enclosure, lighting, etc. Intention to value engineer and possibly work with ASAC to pay for the remaining costs.

Councilman Clark: Pointed out that Absecon does not have any indoor sports facilities, like other nearby towns.

Councilman Sykes: Asked if the enclosure could be rented out and thereby be a source of revenue.

Councilman Clark: That’s an idea that needs to be looked into more.

15. Cleaning & Televising of Sanitary Sewer System: Have been working on this item for past two years and it’s going very well. Absecon owns its sanitary sewer system; However, the system is aging. The City has a separate sewer fund (income from sewer rates). Over past couple years have been conducting video inspections of older pipes. Have identified areas of concern (e.g. leakage). Issues discovered in the City’s initial investigation on Meadowview are being addressed by a contractor (under contract) presently. This cost would come out of the City’s Sewer Budget, not the Capital Budget. Clarified that there is about 175,000 linear feet (LF) of piping throughout the City. The project is budgeted for \$50K, which covers about 5K LF. It will, therefore, take years to complete televising of all pipes. They and Public Works know where the problem areas are, so they prioritize.

16. Rehabilitation of Sanitary Sewer Pipe & Manholes: Rehabilitation of sewer pipe and manhole structures using trenchless technologies (e.g. slip lining and spray coatings.) There is work also needed on Faunce Landing Road and Lisbon Avenue.

(Items #17-20 – Not Capital Projects)

17. 2025 General Engineering: The annual engineering budget for miscellaneous tasks, reviews, grant applications, etc. Allows flexibility in projects as different opportunities come up.

18. Crestview Avenue Drainage Easement: They previously replaced a damaged drainage pipe at the middle of Crestview Avenue, however the area is private property. The City should have a drainage easement there instead. This item is to do the work associated with getting the easement from the property owners (e.g. surveying, easement maps, legal descriptions, filing with County, etc.)

19. Absecon Firehouse Solar Power Purchase Agreement RFP: Does not expect to move on this project until the Firehouse project is closed out. Does not want to put anything on roof while in possession of an open contract with the contractor.
20. Stormwater Infrastructure Mapping Updates: This item is a state mandate. The City has a Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) Permit, which is the drainage system (regulated by the DEP). Rules under the MS4 Program have become more stringent. Recent rules require municipalities to map their entire drainage system, which the City has begun doing already. The rules also require municipalities to GPS locate every drainage asset (e.g. manhole, inlet, etc.) by the end of the 2025 year. The completion of this item would ensure compliance with the State.

Council President DeRose: Based on the Current Budget estimated, that the cumulative cost of completing all projects would be about \$4-5M.

E. Dennis: Confirmed.

Council President DeRose: Reminded E. Dennis that the Budget Meeting scheduled for January 30th was canceled.

E. Dennis: Shared that he will not attend the next Budget Meeting. Will update the Project List to reflect the discussion about the ADA upgrades and then send it out to Council.

COUNCILMAN CLARK – FINANCE COMMITTEE CHAIR

Councilman Clark: Shared that he and Council President DeRose met with each Office to get an idea of their budget requests. Will be providing synopsis of each offices' requests. Praised the CFO, Kristin, and the Deputy CFO, Nelly, for doing phenomenal work and trying to get everyone up to speed. Gave them a 3-week time frame before they need the budget. Acknowledged that costs for Absecon have increased due to several reasons, including the hiring of 7 new Police Officers and last year's contract. There are no major increases to any of the Dept. budgets.

- IT Dept.: The 2024 IT Budget was \$105,000. This year J. Harvey is requesting \$118,000. The difference in the request is because she wants to update the City's MS 365, increase/upgrade security, and camera installation around City Hall and the parks (\$12,000). Last year she was under budget by about \$22,000. Stated that she has been an asset to the City. She believes, for safety reasons, it is important to upgrade the City's MS 365, and, in order to ensure safety for children and others in the park, upgrade the security in the back with camera installation.
- Public Works: The 2025 Budget request remains the same as 2024 at \$225,000. They use pretty much all of their budget.

Council President DeRose: Clarified that anything outside of their budget is a Capital expense. For the past 3-4 years L. Jones has been requesting a dump truck. The price of a dump truck 4 years ago was \$75,000, while now the cost is \$110,000. There is a 10-month lag time to get the truck and it is 20 years old. There would be a Bond Ordinance needed, which Kristin said she would figure out. They have one now but it's falling apart. Identified the item as a "need." Explained that the vehicle has many uses (e.g. snow plowing). The City would still keep the older truck as long as they can, as the value to trade it in is less than \$10K.

Bill Hoch: Attested to the value Public Works gets out of the vehicles. Shared that the State replaces their vehicles every 15 years to ensure reliability. Commented that the older vehicle is without important safety features. When he started work in Absecon, the City had 6-7 dump trucks.

Councilwoman Parker: Considering it will take 10 months, asked how soon they can work on getting the vehicle.

Councilman Clark: Estimates (best case scenario) that the City could get the truck by November.

- Tax Dept.: The Budget remains about \$8,000. They requested a paper folding machine. Many other municipalities seem to already have that equipment. They have some quotes already but they are continuing their search. Will provide a more concrete estimate of the cost at a later date. Currently considering a lease for \$374/month for 63 months.

Councilwoman Parker: Clarified that through the lease the company will maintain the machine.

Council President DeRose: Agreed that the office needs a folding machine but questioned whether this year is the best year to get it.

Councilman Clark: Kristin was shocked to find out the City lacks a folding machine. Mentioned that throughout the year the municipal side of the building shuts down to fold papers.

Councilwoman Evans: Questioned how many times they would need to use a folding machine.

Clerk Crone: Listed types of papers that need folding (e.g. tax bills, late tax bills, sewer bills, etc.)

Councilwoman Parker: Noted there are many complaints from people who receive their tax bills late.

Clerk Crone: Explained that the City already has a lease with Pitney Bowes for the postage machine. Proposed looking into whether they could upgrade the machine to include a paper folder. Also suggested that the City purchase pre-paid envelopes to save money on postage.

Council President DeRose: Wants to investigate this matter further.

- CFO – Finance/Admin.: Budget request for Finance is \$10,000 and Administration is \$30,000 (both same as last year.) There is a request to get a new timeclock, as the current one works poorly.

Councilwoman Parker: Asked whether the payroll company has a system.

Councilman Clark: Indicated that they are looking into Casa (payroll company.) Shared that timeclock systems are expensive. Estimated the service to be about \$20,000 (two \$10,000 clocks). Noted that Galloway uses the system in question.

Councilwoman Parker: Asked whether there was an app that could be a more inexpensive option.

Council President DeRose: Expects a hardwired system to be less expensive. Shared that Public Works still uses punch cards.

Councilwoman Parker: Asked whether the company can come out and fix the timeclock.

Councilman Clark: Shared that they have come out to fix it twice, despite it being only a year old.

Councilman DeRose: The City has to pay for the fixes, as there is no warranty. The City has already invested \$10,000 this year in the timeclock.

Councilwoman Evans: Asked who is monitoring the timeclock now.

Council President DeRose: Kayla does the timesheets for payroll, so it's significantly more work on her when the timeclock is not working.

Council: In agreement that this matter is a priority.

- Clerk Dept.: The 2024 Budget is \$8,500, but only requested \$5,500. The CFO said there is no reason to cut the budget because the remaining funds can be allocated other places, so the budget will remain \$8,500.
- Police Dept.: The 2023 Budget was \$135,000 and the 2024 Budget was \$109,000. The 2025 Budget request is \$117,000. The difference between this year's budget and last year's budget is due to the new officers hired. The request includes \$1,000 per new hire for uniforms. Discussed possibly cutting down the budget for their office supplies, but will increase their overall budget. Mentioned the possibility of upfitting cars and reintroducing a K9 unit. Explained that the new budget policy is one of trust. Will not penalize them in future budgets if they do not spend their entire year's budget.

Chief Laughlin: Shared that they just discovered two more items that the Police Dept. must pay for. The testing for Sergeants will be \$3,500 and the State licensing will cost \$500 per officer. They will move things around and incur other costs. Despite extra costs, will not increase their 2025 budget request.

Council President DeRose: Asked what the Sergeants exam is.

Chief Laughlin: Explained that the Sergeants exam is administered by the NJ State Chiefs Association and is coming up in April 2025. The cost is \$500 per person.

Councilwoman Parker: Asked about test eligibility.

Chief Laughlin: Must meet years experience and college requirements.

Councilwoman Parker: Asked how many people are eligible.

Chief Laughlin: Nine are eligible, however not all 9 will be participating. Once they pass the exam they will be eligible to be Sergeants only in Absecon. They recently conducted a Lieutenant exam in-house.

Councilman Clark: Last year they invested in drones and other items.

- EMS: Will be providing Council President DeRose a full breakdown within the next week.
- Court Dept.: The court budget will remain the same from 2024. Estimated the budget is about \$2,500.
- Fire Dept.: The Fire Dept. is asking for a number of items. Requesting a Chevy Tahoe for the Fire Chief (\$60,000) so that he may give his Explorer to the Deputy Chief. Specifically wants a Tahoe so that they can get better vision around intersections and other areas. A greater concern for the Fire Dept. is regarding their truck which is about 32 years old and out of compliance (need a new pumper). A new truck would take about 30 months to receive once approved. Mentioned a fire truck bond. Discussed purchasing options.

Council President DeRose: Asked Councilwoman Parker, as Public Safety Chair to get a committee of Chiefs together.

Councilman Clark: Requests within 45 days.

- Fire Prevention Bureau: Requesting a car and, because they are currently doing C.O. Inspections, they want additional compensation.

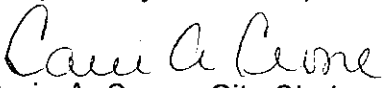
Council President DeRose: Stated that personnel conversation can only be had if introducing new positions. Any talk regarding employees will be handled through individual conversations. Salaries will be discussed within Finance Committee.

Councilman Clark: Mentioned the Atlantic County Economic Alliance.

ADJOURNMENT

Motioned to adjourn: Councilman Clark; Seconded: Councilwoman Parker
All in Favor, None Opposed.

Respectfully submitted,


Carie A. Crone, City Clerk

Approved: 2/16/25