



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

Carie A. Crone, RMC
Municipal Clerk

CITY COUNCIL

OCTOBER 15, 2020

REGULAR MEETING MINUTES

The meeting was called to order by Council President Keith Bennett at 5:00 p.m.

FLAG SALUTE

PRESIDENT'S STATEMENT ON THE SUNSHINE LAW
NOTIFICATION THAT THIS MEETING IS ELECTRONICALLY RECORDED

ROLL CALL

PRESENT: Butch Burroughs, Sandy Cain, Caleb Cavileer, Betty Howell, Steve Light, Frank Phillips, Keith Bennett

ABSENT:

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

REGULAR MEETING AGENDA

2020 ORDINANCE FOR INTRODUCTION

- 09** Amending Ordinance #08-2020, repealing and replacing Chapter 251 of the Code of the City of Absecon entitled "Rental Housing".

Motion to introduce – Councilman Light – second – Councilwoman Howell

Jessica – she reached out to the State for the tax portion of the rental ordinance and it took some time. They said the wording needed to be changed a little, so there are some minor adjustments to the title and some other word changes. There are no substantial changes.

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

2020 RESOLUTIONS

104 Accepting the 2019 Municipal Audit.

Scott – (City Auditor) – went over parts of the audit with everyone, which included specific financial information. They did not come on site as much this year due to COVID. Absecon is in excellent financial condition and there were no audit findings again this year.

105 Authorizing the sale of personal property not needed for public use under N.J.S.A. 40A: 11-36.

Chief – the maintenance costs and upkeep are too high for the amount of time they are used. We figured we sell them and get something out of them and use that money for something in the future.

106 Appointing a Substitute Crossing Guard, namely Craig Henderson.

107 Accepting a Volunteer Firefighter, namely Giovanni Vinci.

PUBLIC PORTION (Agenda Items only)

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

All were in favor.

Chris Seher – 707 Chelsea Road – the agenda went public about 22-23 hours ago before the meeting. He understood that the State requires 48 hours and he is wondering if that is true and why they aren't being put up by then and if anything could be at risk.

Keith – he is not aware of any law, but asked Fred to explain.

Fred – there is nothing to control the agenda of a regularly scheduled meeting. If there is a special or emergency meeting, then you have to.

Jessica - we try to get the agenda up as soon as we have all the information. If there is a holiday on a Monday, it takes longer as well. We try not to put it up and then have to change it. There is no state regulation requiring a time frame to post.

Sandy – we passed something that you couldn't add something at the last minute. There was an issue that made this happen.

Frank – when John was here, he asked for that so it showed us being transparent.

Motion to close public – Councilman Light – second – Councilwoman Cain

All were in favor.

CONSENT AGENDA

Keith – read the resolutions again.

Motion to move the consent agenda – Councilwoman Howell – second – Councilman Cavileer

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

APPROVAL OF BILL LIST – \$2,043,756.84

Motion to approve – Councilman Cavileer – second – Councilman Burroughs

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

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Regular Meeting Minutes – 10/01/2020

Motion to approve – Councilman Burroughs - second – Councilman Cavileer

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

REPORTS

Steve – Parks & Playgrounds – will be meeting on October 20th and has been in contact with Pete Higbee. He asked Keith to give an update on football.

Keith – we had our first game of three home ones this past Sunday. The concession stands were modified for payment at one section and pick up at another. Marks were made on the ground so

people could social distance. People were trying to adhere to it and there was no complaining. He didn't hear anything otherwise. The restrooms were another thing and they had to be closed due to a sewer backup. It was unfortunate, but Public Works is looking into it.

Betty – Economic Development – we had a conference call with someone who is interested in buying an existing building in Absecon and she was glad to hear about our ratable values have increased. Planning Board will meet on October 28th to hear a new application.

Frank – Public Safety – had a work obligation that night and Betty chaired it for him. The Police Chief was in attendance and a taxpayer who complained about speeding on Pitney Road. The County has been contacted and the Chief will be putting more police presence in the area to see if that helps.

Keith – had a tour of the firehouse and it's a really nice building. He appreciated Eddie taking us on the tour.

Sandy – Community Affairs – announced some events that will be happening soon. Halloween will be from 6-8 p.m. and asked everyone to be safe. November 1st the clocks go back.

Caleb – Finance – we met tonight and topics were updating the website in the near future; security funds from 2018 are being used to improve security and expedite the opening to the public. Some personnel matters were discussed regarding replacing our public defender soon and some substitute crossing guards. He thanked Scott for his excellent report on our audit.

Keith – the safety upgrade was suggested by our JIF to secure the building better. The crossing guard hours have been changed a bit due to the new schedule.

Jessica – there is an increase of 4 hours a week and the school is sharing the cost with the city for the additional hours.

Butch - Public Works – our first meeting is next Tuesday in person. The bulkhead out back is moving along nicely. Lloyd reseeded the ballfields, but they started getting used again. Lloyd started the leaf pick up a little bit sooner in the area that has a certain type of tree that is dropping their debris early.

Chief Laughlin – spoke about the speeding areas all around town. Asked residents if they are not participating in trick or treating to please turn out their lights and people should not go to those homes. We probably will have an increase in traffic since some surrounding towns are not having it. If you're driving around, please be careful. We don't want any tragedies. We might make some traffic pattern changes over by the tennis courts and that whole area and we will notify the residents.

Jessica – the shredding event was successful and it was just under 5 tons, a 30% increase from last year. The cleanup went well too. There are State COVID funds that all cities should be receiving. The Best Practices survey has been completed, Absecon scored 24 out of 25.

I would like to address comments certain candidates running for office have made while campaigning this year. To say that the way Absecon is run is not fiscally responsible is completely inaccurate. These accusations are insulting to myself as well as to the current and previous governing bodies and the hardworking and loyal employees of Absecon, administration, police

department and public works. As again evidenced by the perfect audit received by the city's auditors as well as our high rating on the best practices survey, Absecon is most assuredly fiscally responsible and I challenge you to find another community more so than ours. The most telling proof of this is the upgraded credit rating Absecon received this year, right in the middle of the pandemic, while most communities have been downgraded. Absecon's property values are up, home sales are in great demand and sale prices improved.

While it is true that Absecon raised municipal taxes for the first time in many years by 1.7 cents this year, the tax rate is still 2.3 cents lower than it was 6 years ago. The reason for this increase was due to the addition of 1 FT police officer and 2 FT dispatch positions in 2019, which were determined to be in the best interest of the residents of Absecon to provide increased public safety services. No taxes have been or will be raised for the construction of the new firehouse or the many other safety and infrastructure capital improvements being implemented in the City. We have continued to operate in the most efficient manner in order to make this possible. Costs go up every year across the board and we have found ways to absorb them with our fiscally responsible budgeting and keep municipal taxes from escalating. School taxes have increased during this same time period by 22.4 cents, while the municipal tax has decreased by 2.3 cents.

Our staff go above and beyond to save money for the residents by doing a lot of the work in-house that other municipalities pay professionals and outside contractors for. I was able to save \$25K on the recent bond issue alone by performing a lot of the work myself instead of paying the professionals. And this is on top of another \$70K that the city would have paid for a second bond issue if we hadn't strategized to combine the firehouse and regular capital bonds into one. The upgraded credit rating, based on the hard work and fiscally responsible budgeting over the last many years, was monumental in securing an extremely low rate of 2.14% which is fixed for the life of the bond and saves exponentially more future tax dollars.

The new state-of-the-art firehouse is nearing completion and I described in my report last meeting how the redevelopment project is expected to fully pay for the firehouse over the course of the bond. Residents need to know that this project and redevelopment agreement together have offered the opportunity to replace an aging firehouse building that would have otherwise needed substantial funds to maintain with a brand-new facility while bringing much needed commercial development to Absecon.

Absecon has over \$10 Million in added assessments for next year which will increase the City's valuation and tax base for the 2021 budget and will help keep the tax levy under control. This is the highest amount of added assessment we have had in a very long time and shows tremendous investment in our community. Prorated added taxes for 2020 will help to offset decreased revenues due to the pandemic and will help to maintain the City's strong financial condition for the 2021 budget year.

As always, residents who have questions about any topic should reach out to City Hall for information. It is unfortunate that incorrect information gets posted on Facebook and creates confusion.

Frank – that was a great report and almost everything except for the beginning of your statement I agree with. You say the people who are running for election have insulted you. Is this even the right forum for that and the people you are speaking about should have the opportunity to speak and about what you're saying.

Keith – anybody can come in and speak at this meeting.

Jessica – if I receive something in the mail as a resident of this community and I am insulted by it, I should have an opportunity to say something.

Frank – yes, but you were speaking as the CFO/Administrator

Jessica - I guess I'm speaking as both, but I can say that when I read something that is contradictory to information that I know, then I feel the need to report it.

Frank - there is no argument with that, but you ended your speech saying residents should reach out to city hall, but you started out saying candidates and that's what I'm talking about. Other than that, I think the context of what you said is well done. My point was how you presented it tonight here in this forum, which I don't think is proper.

MONTHLY REPORTS - Carie

Tax Collection - \$441,213.12

Construction Office - \$11,109.00

Municipal Court - \$3678.03

City Clerk - \$14,244.00

Mayor – she thanked everyone who was involved with our cleanup day and shredding event. We are very grateful for all the help. She reminded residents not to take the shopping carts off the businesses properties'. She congratulated Roy and Joyce Talley on their daughter Nicole's wedding, where she had the honor of marrying them. She announced that Paula Finnerty passed away this morning. She was the Attales Gym teacher for many years and send her condolences to Frank and the family.

Keith – reminded everyone that we do have an official ballot box out front of City Hall. He wished everyone running for office in the local, county and state races good luck.

PUBLIC PORTION

Motion to open to the public was made by Councilman Light – second – Councilman Phillips
All were in favor.

Chris Seher – asked how the football field is and Keith said it could be better. It is getting torn up and with the money that was put into it and we have an outside agency that is fertilizing it. In speaking to people, this was not the normal season for grass, crabgrass, etc. and he's holding out hope for it. Regarding the crossing guards, are we advertising heavily? For many mornings, there are police officers at the corners that he uses to take his grandkids to school. J.R. said we just hired a new one and do have some subs. Can we get a current update on the 2019 status of the excess/surplus funds that was previously discussed in February? Jessica did not have that figure with her, but would get it. From reading the Planning Board minutes, they started in January discussing recommended ordinance changes regarding signage in Absecon and the major intent was to help businesses in town. It was voted unanimously by the board where Betty and the Mayor voted as well. One issue was the County road in question, but that answer came back in August with an answer. Once we got over that hurdle, why haven't we moved forward with the sign ordinance to try and attempt to help out the businesses? There are violations out on businesses that would go away if this was passed.

Keith – he did read the minutes and he was wrong about us requesting the Planning Board to go over the sign ordinance and recommend changes. He was under the impression that we hadn't. He apologized, but he can't say why we haven't moved forward. This is our first meeting with all of us in person and we probably should have acted on it sooner. He asked that Council be recopied and it be reviewed and put on a council meeting.

Chris – he appreciated everything Jessica said regarding the finances of our city. To the point that Frank made about her statement against people running for office, he doesn't know of anything on a piece of literature that was personally attacking her and would like to see it. He asked why the meetings are not on TV anymore. Many people do watch the meetings.

Jessica – we are moving into a digital age and thought giving people access that way would be easier reach more residents that don't have comcast and the complaints about the audio still were coming in.

Chris – asked about the literature that was sent to her that led her to make that statement

Jessica – it alluded to statements that the city was not fiscally responsible and I that's what I took from it.

Melissa Phillips – 263 Connecticut Avenue – she noticed that members of the public tried to comment tonight and were muted. One tried to say there is no link to the website to watch the meeting and the other asked what about old folks that can't do this? She hears all the time that the old folks can't go onto a computer and watch a meeting. They don't have smart phones and can go on zoom either. She's asking what you intend to do for the senior residents that have no means to watch the meeting.

Betty – asked Jessica if it would be a problem putting it back on the TV? It took her by surprise that we were not going to do it anymore.

Jessica – we can discuss it

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

ADJOURNMENT

Motion to adjourn – Councilman Phillips – second – Councilman Light
All were in favor.

Respectfully submitted,


Carie A. Crone, City Clerk

Approved: 11-19-2020