



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

FEBRUARY 29th, 2024 6:30 PM

MINUTES

FLAG SALUTE – Mayor

ROLL CALL

PRESENT: Councilmembers Sandy Cain, Alex Clark, Rich DeRose, Steve Light, Tommy Marrone, Christine Parker and Council President Nick LaRotonda

ALSO PRESENT: Mayor Kim Horton, City Administrator/CFO Jessica Thompson, City Clerk Carie Crone, Police Chief J.R. Laughlin, Engineer Eddie Dennis

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

BUDGET DISCUSSION

J. Thompson: Capital Budget – Start with does everyone has any thoughts on any of the Projects Eddie brought to their attention. Which you would like to move forward with.

E. Dennis – The list has been updated according to the feedback he received from the first meeting.

N. LaRotonda – There has been a cost adjustment to the Playground Equipment.

A. Clark – Yes. Lloyd is waiting for two proposals for the nets. Nets are missing behind the backstop, so definitely a safety issue.

E. Dennis – Reminded that if Lloyd is getting the prices to make sure he knows that has to go out to bid with prevailing wages.

J. Thompson – With it being a safety hazard everyone agrees to keep that in. All agreed – Yes.

N. LaRotonda – Lloyd looked at the Playground Equipment, the cost for the short-term fix is \$6,000.

A. Clark – Lloyd got a quote of \$30,000 for a new one which includes taking the old one out.

J. Thompson – All okay with keeping in the Playground Equipment. All agreed – Yes.

Road Program

J. Thompson – Needs to know if everyone is good with the million dollars we typically do each year and determine the final roads after the fact.

N. LaRotonda – We are all comfortable with as discussed considering the Capital Funds we have available. Did we solidify the roads that we're picking?

E. Dennis – We have a short list and the kind of influxes depending on this conversation. Once we know the amount we can narrow it down.

J. Thompson – Whatever we determine on Capital we would probably do a Bond Ordinance for the Road Program and then the other items we can reallocate Capital Funds if we have pay for the other items. Makes sense as one big project to do that a Bond Ordinance for the whole Road Program.

Crestview Phase I & Phase II

E. Dennis – **Phase I** is essentially paid for by the Grant and last years budget. There's just the drainage issue that popped up, that we have a problem with the curb on the road, so that's what's up for discussion for this budget.

Phase II – would be to do the cut through and for that we have a pending Grant Application. We can wait to see if we get the grant, you can budget and still see if we get the grant. That one is a stand-alone project.

S. Light – Is there anyway this can be rolled into the Road Program.

E. Dennis – We can, yes.

S. Light – Is there additional monies to carry the sidewalk all the way through.

E. Dennis – That was all included in the original budget. Bare in mind, with Phase II, if we proceed with the project before we hear about the grant, then got the grant, we wouldn't be eligible to use it. Your going to need the \$75,000 for Phase I.

T. Marrone – This is covered in the Capital Funding that is not going to be bonded for, so why can't we put it in the budget right now, and then if we don't use it we don't use it.

J. Thompson – So do you want to do the whole \$175,000 or how much do you want to put in for that?

E. Dennis – That's what it will cost, so if you want to budget for it. If you don't get the grant you can still do it that's what you'll need.

A. Clark – What's the odds of getting the Grant.

E. Dennis – From a smaller pot of money and more competitive. Last round there was an extra shot of money with the stimulus bill. A much better shot this year. And for it being Phase II of one they already approved.

City Hall Accessible Ramp – Keep in.

Pitney Park Tennis Courts

J. Thompson – We have completed the application documents at this point.

E. Dennis – Yes, they're completed, but not submitted yet. If awarded that is up to a \$100,000 grant. We added the Pickle Ball Court conversion, so you would need to budget at least \$25,000 if you wanted to add that to the project.

R. DeRose – How long is this going to last with the underground river that just eating the tennis courts. Are we throwing good money at a continuous problem?

E. Dennis – The water issue aside, Tennis Courts always require this.

R. DeRose – Is there any truth to the rumor that the ground is not compatible for a tennis court.

E. Dennis – Last time we put under drains in. After that the water bubbling up has seemed to stop.

J. Thompson – If we don't get the grant do we want to put it in regardless?

S. Cain – Is there any cheaper solution until we see if we get the grant.

E. Dennis – This is the cheapest option. And remember just because the grant is capped at \$100,000 doesn't mean you'll get the whole \$100,000.

S. Light – Believes it's a safety issue. Residents have reached out with safety concerns.

A. Clark – Suggest putting in \$50,000 in case we only get \$75,000. Everyone agreed.

Sewer

J. Thompson – Meadowview was determined with the videoing to be in dire need. Will put in the \$130,000 needed for that. Has \$50,000 for televising, thought we can bring that down a little bit, maybe \$30,000 because it doesn't make sense to do more videoing then we can do repairs.

N.J. Ave. & Highland Blvd.

J. Thompson – Pedestrian Crossing Sign - \$40,000.

N. LaRotonda – That we said we were going to see if County will split. Suggested only putting in 50% of the cost.

Fire House Solar

J. Thompson – This is for proposals. This is money we would have to put in upfront. Can't be Capital, have to budget separately.

E. Dennis – Would have to put together a bid packet of where you would want to put the solar panels on the roof. Then they will get bids from solar contractors saying we'll do it. There's no cost to install, they'll build it for free and charge you have the rate the electric company charges. They own and maintain it for a twenty-year period. Typically, what you put out to do the bid the contractor will reimburse you.

S. Cain – We know the Electric bill for that building is extremely high.

A. Clark – It'll save a lot of money in the long run. Makes sense for the amount of money to take a shot.

E. Dennis – Infrastructure Mapping. Updating the drainage and sewer maps. Total amount of \$55,000 which would be to update both maps. We have a \$25,000 Grant that will go towards the drainage portion. Two years from now, every Municipality is going to be required to have all of their draining assets GPS.

Everyone agreed to take \$30,000 from the Sewer Fund and do both.

Absecon Estates Drainage Study – Pipes are old, undersized and collapsed. This would piggy back on the work we're doing on Highland Blvd. right now.

T. Marrone – Can it wait a year.

E. Dennis – This is just for the study.

Police Vehicles/Drones and Vehicle Upfits - \$224,000 was the request.

T. Marrone – Will cars work for you and are they more available.

Chief Laughlin – Pricing isn't much different. Got in a bind a few years ago, where we had no 4WD vehicles. It's easier for us to maintain the same fleet. Goal is to get cars off the road at 100,000 miles.

Public Works Dump Truck – taking that off.

A. Clark – Spoke with Lloyd and he said he'd prefer to have the baseball netting and the playground equipment and wait a year on the Dump Truck.

Police Dept.

J. Thompson: An MOA with the contracts was finalized this afternoon. More analysis is required in order to determine a salary budget.

N. LaRotonda – Asked Chief Laughlin how many officers we have.

Chief Laughlin – 28 Full Time and 2 Class II's. One Class II is split between us and Code Enforcement.

N. LaRotonda – Would like to see us hire at least one, but would like to hire two.

T. Marrone – We need to run the numbers.

A. Clark – What is a priority an OPRA person or another Officer.

Chief Laughlin – OPRA – you're paying a lot in Attorney fees and the time of the Sergeants and Lieutenants.

R. DeRose – Asked whether the City could hire another Class II Officer whose main responsibility is OPRA, but during periods of lulls, could take on police responsibilities.

Chief Laughlin – If that is the only option given, they will make it happen. Emphasized the exceptionalism of hiring someone with proper experience and knowledge, commented on the needs to offer a salary that would attract someone who fits the description.

Councilman DeRose: Asked if there is anyone in-house or soon to retire who would be interested in the position.

Chief Laughlin – No one who would be available any time soon.

C. Crone – Suggested that any OPRA Police hires become declared the Police Records Custodian (by resolution), and thereby assume completely responsible for all Police-related OPRA inquiries, from start to finish (without any involvement with the Clerk's Office). But questioned whether that hire would also hold a Class II position.

S. Cain – Had the understanding that part of the current issue with the City's OPRA's, is that the Police Record employees no longer wanted the responsibility.

Chief Laughlin – The Police's Record employees do not work on the video material; however, they are responsible for preparing responsive paperwork. OPRA requirements change so often the State has recommended all OPRA responders attend a class regarding the topic at least once a year.

C. Crone – Shared that the responsibility for OPRA's are currently split between she (Police-related OPRA's) and her deputy (Non-police-related OPRA's).

S. Cain – Suggested the possibility of hiring another Class II Officer and then having someone already familiar with OPRA, get a stipend for doing the additional OPRA work.

Chief Laughlin – Pointed out the difficulty finding someone familiar with OPRA, most people will need training. Also noted that this option would not ease the burden that OPRA places on the Clerk's Office.

T. Marrone – Opined that ideally, the City would hire an OPRA person and 2 FT Police Officers, but asked which hires are absolutely necessary at the current moment.

Chief Laughlin – Affirmed that an OPRA employee is necessary.

T. Marrone – Asked whether a properly trained civilian can be responsible for the task.

Capt. Mazer – Indicated that there was probably some Internal information that a civilian should not have access to.

T. Marrone – Prefers the idea of hiring a Police Officer to do police work and a civilian to be responsible for OPRA.

A.Clark – Suggested that if the City hires a FT OPRA employee, that they could add additional responsibilities to the position (e.g. technology), or split their time between offices.

R. DeRose – Suspects that other municipal positions may be easier to fill, so proposed possibly offering the position to a current FT employee and then backfilling for that position.

A.Clark – Asked what information is needed right now, for the budget.

J. Thompson – Needs to know what positions are being considered, when they would be hired, and their hourly rate. Assumes the position will be PT so that they do not have to pay for benefits such as health insurance.

Lt. Adams – Warned Council that due to new licensing requirements, even PT Class II Officers will have to dedicate much of their time to training. Also acknowledged that a civilian employee would be unable to have access to IA information.

R. DeRose – Was under the impression any candidate for the OPRA position must be former law enforcement.

Capt. Mazer – That is preferred, but not required.

N. LaRotonda – Stated that they should budget for an additional Police Officer (ideally about September).

Final Comments

A. Clark – Asked what was planned in regard to the Green Team.

J. Thompson – Planned to give the Green Team a budget of \$1k, and then dedicated about \$3k to a miscellaneous Recreation budget, which could be used for a variety of purposes.

N. LaRotonda - Supports the idea.

J. Thompson – Will need to know how much money each sports organization wants. The City will need to have discussions with each organization for clarification.

R. DeRose – Informed Council that Galloway EMS does not provide free service for youth sports, and not included in their original quote. More money will need to be budgeted to pay for the service or sports organizations will need to pay for it. Some municipalities cover the costs, but acknowledged it would be pricey for the City to pay for the additional service (about \$400 a game).

N. LaRotonda – Suggested they try to negotiate the service.

C. Parker – Suggested maybe hiring an athletic training instead of the EMS.

S. Light – Pointed out that EMS attended last year's Concerts in the Park.

R. DeRose – Clarified that the EMS did that as a kind gesture and show of goodwill during the City's EMS service transfer. Informed Council that they would not be attending the Concerts this year.

Chief Laughlin – Supported the idea of hiring a trainer.

C. Parker – Suggested calling Rothman about the idea.

N. LaRotonda – Councilman Clark will work on the appropriation of funds and provide them to J. Thompson. The City currently has an RFP put for EMS services, but it's a possibility that Councilman Light may eventually need to speak with EMS about youth-sport services.

J. Thompson – Asked if there were any other matters to discuss.

A. Clark – The Finance Committee will be discussing salaries on the Municipal side of the building. Intend to get those numbers to J. Thompson so that she can work them into the budget.

J. Thompson – Waiting on Bill Blaney for an update regarding the tower agreement. They are still working on the specifics but hoping for a conclusion by the end of next week. Looking forward to the anticipated bonus for the City.

PUBLIC PORTION – (Agenda items only)

Motioned to open to the public: Councilman Light; Seconded: Councilman Marrone
All in Favor, None Opposed.

No discussion.

Motioned to close to the public: Councilman DeRose; Seconded: Councilman Clark
All in Favor, None Opposed.

ADJOURNMENT

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

Respectfully submitted,



Carie A. Crone, City Clerk

Approved: 4-4-24