CITY OF ABSECON
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# CITY COUNCIL

## BUDGET MEETING

## MARCH 26TH, 2026 6:00 PM

## MINUTES

**FLAG SALUTE** – Councilman Light

**ROLL CALL**
**PRESENT:** Councilmembers Alex Clark, Linda Evans and Council President Richard DeRose
**ABSENT:** Councilmembers Nick LaRotonda and Mike Sykes BS
**ALSO PRESENT**: City Clerk Carie Crone, Administrator Jessica Snyder, Engineer Nick DiCosmo and Chief Laughlin.

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

## WORK MEETING AGENDA

**2026 MUNICIPAL BUDGET DISCUSSION**

**PILOT PAYMENTS**
**Councilman Clark** – Company's billed are, Chipotle, White Horse Liquors, Firestone and Wendy's. Estimated based on current tax rates, total billed for 1st & 2nd Quarter - $73,482.45, 5% to the County, so net for 1st & 2nd Quarter will be $69,808.33. Want everyone to have a general idea where we stand on that. The Pilot Program based on the current taxes and where we're looking ahead.
**Council President DeRose** – Is the 5% to the County a State Regulations.
**Councilman Clark** – No, that is what previous Council negotiated at the time they did the Pilot Program. Very favorable deal for us, 95% goes to the City and only 5% to the County. There's still land there and new businesses coming, so that will also help revenue.

**CROSSING GUARDS**
**Councilman Clark** – Projected increases for crossing guards, it's been very difficult to get crossing guards, we discussed a lot of ideas as far as how to pay them. Proposing in the budget to give them an extra $1 increase. Originally asking for almost $2 increase, but unfortunately can't do that.
**Councilman Light** – It was proposed to potentially have that raise go in conjunction with the school year.

**Councilman Clark** – That is what we are proposing. The CFO is looking into the legality of starting the raise with the school year because by the time the budget is adopted won't be till the end of April and they'll only have two months left. But the raise would be retro, so it will go back to January, which I'm okay with. The overall increase to the budget for the years is $5,880.

**CLASS II OFFICERS**
**Councilwoman Parker** – Does one go outside of the salary ranges that we already passed?
**J. Snyder** – No, it falls under that range.

**STAFF – SALARIES**
**Councilman Clark** – We kicking around a few different ideas for staff raises, trying to see how things impacts budgets. The Staff on City Hall side have been working harder than normal and there's a lot less of them and there's a lot more demand on them. We discussed 2% and an additional personal day because they're one personal day short, we also discussed 3% because that's what the Union gets and try to keep everyone in line, just not sure exactly how that would impact the budget.

**ENGINEERING**
**Councilman Clark –** 2026 Projects, Current Fund Budget we put in a total of $50,000 for general engineering. To finish the easement on Crestview Ave. we put in $10,000. Stormwater Watershed Improvement Plan, Phase II, we estimated $15,000. Total for General Engineering is $75,000. 2025 most of it is already paid for.

**Nick DiCosmo:** For the Stormwater Improvement Plan that is mandatory by the State. New this year and non-capital.

> *2026 Road Program:* Paired with the Roadway Improvement to Franklin Blvd. we estimated about $400,000 between two, which is equivalent to what the City budgeted last year for roads. That amount paired with the $231,000, NJDOT grant will allow us to resurface Franklin Blvd. from Nevada Ave. to the end of the road.
> **Councilman Clark** – We roughly have $138,000 in excess money from Capital Projects from last year that we're going to use to do a lot of these for things this year that are going to cost the City next to nothing. And we got a lot of grants that are going to help do a lot of these things at minimal cost to the City.
>
> *2027 Road Program:* What we've been typically doing in the recent years is to budget $50,000 and we can use that to design whatever roads you may want to do next year.
> **Councilman Clark –** We have brought that amount down, in the past it was $100,000 and in 2025 we cut it to $50,000. We're still doing the same number of roads, just not with the City's money.
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> *Highland Blvd. Pedestrian Safety Improvements:* Construction of the sidewalk down Highland Blvd. and the intersection improvements at the new 4-way stop Total came to $823,000, we received NJDOT Funding of $663,000 so would potentially require an additional $160,000 to complete that project, but I believe you spoke about reducing the City contribution so that we can construct, design and build that project within the DOT funded grant.
>
> *Shore Rd. Flood Mitigation Roadway Improvements:* $85,000, that money was budgeted last year, so that will get us through the end of construction engineering support.

*Pedestrian Crosswalk Safety Improvements:* Budgeted previously, $550,460 from NJDOT funding and $55,000 from 2025 budget.

*Absecon Estates Drainage Improvements:* IBank funding, no money needed from the 2026 Budget. $225,000 grant money for design and $2,000,000 of principle forgiveness money for the remaining cost.

*Hobart Avenue Drainage Improvements:* IBank Funding - $235,000 received. We'll get started on design and construction money will come later.

*City-Wide Sanitary Sewer:* $1,540,000 IBank Funding to do cleaning, televising and design of pump station improvements.

*Crestview Avenue Drainage Easement:* $10,000 budgeted in 2025, we just never got to it.

*Multi-Use Sports Facility Pole Barn Structure:* Received $80,000 in grant funding last year. Applied for another $80,000 grant this year. If we receive both grants we'll have $160,000 to complete this project and with partnership of ASAC and few other different ideas, not going to go into the City's fund for $195,000, we don't have it. We talked about designing it, getting is situated and continuing putting in for these grants.

**WISH LIST ITEMS**

*Municipal Building Parking Lot Improvements:* $190,000. At some point is going to need to get done, unfortunately not a priority. Finance Committee voted no, but up to Council.

*Crestview Avenue:* Resurfacing and repaving from Pitney to Morton, would address the asphalt irregularities from the sidewalk installation and also installation of speed humps along Crestview. Currently working on applying for a NJDOT grant for this. Suggested potentially budgeting some money for design, in case we do get the grant the design process can get started.

*Shore Road and Church Street Pedestrian Safety Crosswalk:* Last year we had to make some cuts in crossing guard locations. After discussion in the Public Works Committee, we got an agreement from NJDOT for $45,000 for a flashing yellow crosswalk, between Church Street and Shore Rd. Cost to the City is 25%, estimated to be about $15,000 on the high end.

**Council President DeRose** – Asked about having a Solar Company give an estimate for the Fire House, free of charge and then take that and turn it into an RFP.
**N. DiCosmo** – Believed the thought was that Remington and Vernick would handle the RFP process of it. I'd have to confirm if there was any structural design that we would look into for mounting the solar panels on the rood.
**Council President DeRose** – I do believe that putting Solar on top of the Firehouse would be beneficial.
**Councilman Light** – You can build a whole array of ground standing panels, no mounting on the building and compromising the roof. Takes some planning, have to pick a piece of land, figure out usage and you get the money back.

**N. DiCosmo** – Regarding lighting, we are pursuing a grant, free energy audit done through the State. They will identify any areas were lighting improvements can be done.

**<u>Councilman Clark – Debt Service</u>** – Going up about $105,000, year after year.
**Health Insurance –** Going up 18%, working on getting different quotes. Not enough new revenues coming in to cover the debt, as well as health Insurance increases, salary increases – which are estimated to be about $230,000 per year.

**Councilman Light –** Any enhancements done where the crosswalk is in front of Calabria's, need make sure it's adequately lit. Where we're encouraging them to cross is dark. Pedestrian safety is a priority.
**Councilman Clark** – It'll be further down, Highland and Blenheim, there's a flashing yellow at the crosswalk at Calabria's. But they are talking about new lighting for the new area.
**ACEA – R. DeRose** - Cost to join is about $3,600, it's to help New Jersey Avenue with redevelopment. We have received well over $25,000 in services from them since their visit to New Jersey Avenue. 14 people from 5 State agencies came and toured Absecon for 4 hours and walked into every business.
**A. Clark –** The $3,600 isn't an additional budget item, it will come out of departments budgets, technically the Mayor and Administrators budgets.

**Councilman Light** – Wants the public to know that Council hasn't taken a raise since 2010. And in 2025 took a decrease, but taking some from our salaries and bought our own phones, so public has direct access to us.

**Council President DeRose** – Budget will be introduced at the April meeting and then must be adopted 30 days after, then gets submitted to the State.

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

**Warren Kotacska** – 908 Elm – Last year there was a packet showing where the expenditures and the revenues were coming from. Would like to see that for this year before you submit the budget, so that we can have input. I asked last year to be on the committee that formulates the budget and never heard back.
**R. DeRose** – That committee was formed and has met. And we will be doing the presentation as we did last year.
**A. Clark** – Last year we did the presentation after we adopted the budget, he's asking for it to be done prior to the budget adoption. I'll be happy to sit down with you prior to go over the budget.
**W. Kotacska –** It was stated the budget process gets started in September, but there has been no open process for the public to come in and discuss the budget.
**R. DeRose –** There have been 7-8 Finance meetings. There's a Finance Committee meeting every month that's open to the public. To clarify, your asking for the presentation before the budgets passed, so when we introduce the budget?
**A. Clark** – I'm going to do another power point, but it's a lot of work, so I can't guarantee it'll be prior to the budget passing, but I'll do my best. I can answer most of your questions without that and willing to meet with you.
**R. DeRose** - I do agree with him in terms of when we introduce, but I also understand it's a lot of work. We can have something, but the full presentation, which we are going to do, won't be prepared for April.
**W. Kotacska** – A lot of resident where blindsided by the tax increase last year and have spoken out about it. A plainer way of presenting it may be easier for the people.
**R. DeRose** – I'm the first person in Absecon history to put all that information on Social Media and will absolutely be doing it again this year. And the first time the City has done a full power point that was also emailed out to people.

**Councilwoman Parker** – The power point was pretty straight forward, it wasn't above the general publics understanding, even included pie charts.
**A. Clark** – Just looked at the last budget meeting minutes you can see each departments budget, it's all typed out in there. It's all transparency here, there's nothing to hide, I don't dictate these numbers, I can't control these numbers, the numbers are the numbers. The decisions that have been made as a Council for over the last 10 years are what we're paying for now. Decisions that were made 10 years ago and decisions made last year are all going into the same pot at the end of the day.
**C. Parker** – The next Finance Committee meeting is prior to the next Council Meeting, April 16th @5pm in the conference room.
**Councilman Light** – All our Committee meetings, date and times are on the City's website.
**W. Kotacska** – It was brought up in the past about doing a multi-year plan.
**R. DeRose** – We are, meeting with the Auditors in October was already looking at the 2028 budget.
**A. Clark** – I won't have that for the next meeting, but that information will be in the full power point presentation. Changed auditors for that reason, old one wasn't giving us a multi-year plan. Cost have gone up substantially for everybody in the Country, we've already cut City Hall to bare bones, we're utilizing Shared Services – we're doing a lot on that side to keep cost down. I can't control health care cost, I can't control revenues. The Cannabis revenues came in a lot less than anticipated, Pilot Program if we get all those locations filled that's going to help us. You need revenue and we don't have a lot of area to increase revenue. 2025 we used $1.5 million of the surplus and returned all but $165,000, so using less surplus this year to budget, the year before, 2024-2025 we lost $900,000 in surplus.

**Brandon Santangelo** – 150 Crestview Ave. - Can you explain debt services increase of $100,000.
**Councilman Clark** – We're paying more on principle. There's the firehouse debt and bonds for Road Programs and those consolidated in 2022 so now the payments keep going up and I can chart that increase because we know what that increase will be all the way up to 2036.
**Council President DeRose** – Basically like a credit card, the city paid for the firehouse on credit and only paid the interest and now the principle is due. And you can only do that for so long and that's why we say a big increase last year because the lenders reached out and said we couldn't continue to do that.
**A. Clark** – Our debt for 2025 was $1,246,643.78. Debt payment for 2026 is $1,351,628.86.
**R. DeRose** – Historically we spent a million dollars on credit. The road program has shrunk because a one million dollar or $500,000 road program isn't a significant impact to the 2026 budget. But we need to plan for years down the road, we've had to accept that we're in so much debt, that our debt services are more then the basic needs of the City. And we need to reduce any new debt.
**A. Clark** – The surplus when I started was at $3.8 million, so instead of raising taxes and making tough decisions, they used the surplus, and that eventually runs out.
**Councilwoman Parker** – What is our 5-year plan with the surplus.
**A. Clark** – our plan is to get it back to 4.5 million.
**R. DeRose** – We've never budgeted looking down the road, and by doing so we know what we need to make up over how many years to get us to our goals. If you look at surrounding Municipalities for the last ten years, you'll see they have raised taxes. In that 10-year timeframe Absecon didn't raise taxes and usually that's something to be proud of, but not when you look at how that was actually done. Per the auditor, Absecon hasn't brought in enough revenue to cover just inflation alone, inflation itself has gone up more than Absecon's revenues have increased, due to not raising taxes.

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

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

Respectfully submitted,

Carie A. Crone, RMC
Carie A. Crone, City Clerk

Approved: 6-4-26