



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
REGULAR MEETING
MARCH 7TH, 2024 6:30 PM
MINUTES

FLAG SALUTE

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

ROLL CALL

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

ALSO PRESENT: Mayor Kim Horton, City Administrator/CFO Jessica Thompson, City Engineer Ed Dennis, City Solicitor Bill Blaney Esq., City Clerk Carie Crone, and Police Chief J.R. Laughlin

PRESENTATION – Atlantic County Engineering – Road Improvement Projects:

Doug DiMeo: The City has two upcoming projects, on California Ave. and on Ohio Ave. This presentation will fulfill their public involvement requirement for the federal aid process. The funding for this project is provided by the Surface Transportation Block Program (about \$3m for both projects).

John Musto: Thanked the City for hosting their presentation. Expects to return to Absecon soon to discuss a project on Pitney Rd. The projects previously mentioned are two separate projects, and therefore will be bid separately. Both projects are about the same length. The first project is exclusively in Absecon, on Ohio Ave, from Mill Rd. to the west side of the Ohio Ave. bridge. The project is primarily milling and paving. They will go in and replace any drainage deemed insufficient. Will also take care of spots on the road which collect standing (e.g. the corner of Mill & Ohio Ave.), guide rail upgrades, and curb ramps. The other project on California Ave. (spans across Absecon, Egg Harbor Twp., and Pleasantville). The project will include milling and paving, fixing drainage issues, and upgrading guide rails. The State has jurisdiction over matters around the area, such as curbing. Believes they plan to upgrade signal-area sections to bring them up to ADA compliance (Absecon to Somers Point). The plans in question are posted online at the Atlantic County website. There will be a 15-day period in which the public may share any feedback to the County Engineering Division for their consideration. These plans are currently in the conceptual phase. The County has submitted their plans to the NJDEP and is awaiting their approvals. After the period for feedback, they will submit preliminary plans, specs estimate, and have a review with the DOT for any comments/revisions. Unable to go out to bid until all plans are completely approved, among other reasons. The earliest that the projects are expected to be completed is Fall 2024, but could very likely

be pushed back until the next year. The projects are funded with federal aid money. The cost of the California Ave project is about \$2m, while the Ohio Ave. project costs about \$1m. Estimates will be finalized after ultimate design approval. If the cost is not fully covered by funding, the offset will be covered with County bonds. Opened the presentation to any questions.

Council President LaRotonda: Asked whether the County intended to notify local residents of any action being taken on nearby streets that may affect them.

J. Musto: Confirmed. Indicated that the County will coordinate with residents.

Council President LaRotonda: Stated that, once the plans are finalized, the City will put them on their website so that they are available for public view.

Councilman Light: On an unrelated topic, commented on heavy pedestrian traffic in the City.

Asked whether the County has looked at any of the underbrush in the city. Noted that the County trimmed underbrush on New Jersey Ave. last Fall. Asked whether the City could for the County to do that again.

J. Musto: Suggested that the County's Public Works could possibly look into. Warned that they may be specifically limited within their project. Asked if he had any particular spot in mind.

Councilman Light: Did not, just wanted to make the County aware.

J. Musto: Will rely the message to County Public Works.

Councilwoman Cain: For the California Ave. Project questioned whether they intended to close the entire road or partially reducing traffic (from Route 9 to Shore Rd.) Asked because bus stops exists within the area.

Councilman DeRose: On Ohio, as well.

J. Musto: They are currently working on Traffic Control and Detour Plans, but has not been able to look at them yet. Believes for California Ave., (between Route 9 and Shore Rd.), that there is enough width for a one-direction detour. Their contractor works in conjunction with the Police, schools, and NJ Transit, while making traffic decisions. The plans for this project have not yet been finalized. There are sections of California Ave. which are narrower, however, and so they may have to close the entire section of the roadway.

Councilwoman Cain: Asked if they plan to realign the turn lanes.

E. Dennis: Shared that the task was forwarded up to the State. That was Mr. Musto's reference earlier about the State's jurisdiction over the intersection at Route 9. They will follow up with the State, who is responsible for reviewing the plans.

J. Musto: Has not heard any update.

Chief Laughlin: Indicated that the State has plans to work on that matter in 2028.

Councilman DeRose: Asked if the County has conducted any traffic study on the impact that the new homes being built, will have on Mill Rd.

Council President LaRotonda: Spoke to Tony Pagano, who suggested that preliminary studies began, and the biggest issue seems to be the bottlenecking around the train bridge. Reassured Council that the traffic study was being conducted.

REGULAR MEETING AGENDA

2024 RESOLUTIONS – CONSENT AGENDA

CONSENT AGENDA: All matters listed under item, Consent Agenda, are considered to be routine by the City Council and will be enacted by one motion in the form listed. There will be no separate discussion of these items. If discussion is desired, that item will be removed from the Consent Agenda and will be discussed separately.

- 58** Authorizing the Transfer of Appropriation Reserves in the 2023 Municipal Budget per N.J.S.A. 40A: 4-59.

J. Thompson: The small transfer is to access the funds to pay for additional invoices received.

59 Authorizing the execution of a lease of real property and use of an existing Communications Tower and unrelated communications equipment.

J. Thompson: The City had gone out to bid for the lease of the Communications Tower (behind the American Legion and Firehouse) in December 2023. This lease is rather long-term. The previous lease lasted for about 20-25 years. This current lease is for a period of 5-year lease with the possibility of 4 renewals (a possible 20-year lease altogether.) Received a good response. The lease was awarded with a \$50k signing bonus and slight increase to amount of revenue from the rental equipment installed. It is the same company we used before so they are reliable. Once the lease is approved, the City will receive the signing bonus. The lease will offer a regular revenue source. The City will keep their equipment on the Communications Tower, which the City will be able to use, free of charge.

B. Blaney: The issue was that there was a proposed lease included in the bid packet, however, it needed to be amended to pertain to the present situation (that being how the tower is already constructed.)

PUBLIC PORTION – (Agenda items only)

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

No discussion.

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

CONSENT AGENDA VOTE

Motioned to move Consent Agenda: Councilman DeRose; Seconded: Councilman Marrone
Roll Call: Cain - Yes; Clark – Yes; DeRose - Yes; Light – Yes; Marrone - Yes; Parker – Yes; LaRotonda – Yes

APPROVAL OF BILL LIST – \$ 1,827,239.65

Motioned to accept: Councilman DeRose; Seconded: Councilman Clark
Roll Call: Cain - Yes; Clark – Yes; DeRose - Yes; Light – Yes; Marrone - Yes; Parker – Yes; LaRotonda – Yes

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Regular Meeting Minutes – 2/1/2024

Budget Meeting Minutes – 1/25/2024

Motioned to accept: Councilman Light; Seconded: Councilman Marrone

Roll Call: Cain - Yes; Clark – Yes; DeRose - Yes; Light – Yes; Marrone - Yes; Parker – Yes; LaRotonda – Yes

REPORTS

Councilwoman Parker – Community Affairs: Met tonight at 5:30PM. Topics of conversation included the City's Earth Day Celebration on 4/20/24 from 9AM-12PM. There will be shredding, a community cleanup, and the Councilmen have volunteered to collect electronics to drop off at the 4-H for disposable. The Memorial Day Parade will be on Monday, May 27th. The City's Brunch will be on June 1st at 10:30AM at the Methodist Church, where volunteers and donations are welcome. Donation letters have been sent to local businesses. The Absecon Arts Alliance has asked the City's Community Affairs Committee to partner in their annual Easter Egg Hunt at Heritage Park on March

23rd from 10AM-12PM (the City will be providing volunteers to assist). Councilman Light discussed participating, again, in Flags for Forgotten Soldiers. Next meeting will be April 4th at 5:30PM.

Councilman Marrone: Asked Councilwoman Parker whether she sent the donation letters herself.

Councilwoman Parker: Denied, explained that the Mayor sent them.

Councilman Marrone: Mentioned that when he was in charge of the event last year, he found a larger company to fully fund the event, so that he did not need to request financial help from local businesses. Asked why that route was not taken again this year.

Mayor Horton: Suggested that many local businesses are interested in participating and contributing in the Senior Brunch or community event. Donations are optional and so each business can decide whether they wish to contribute.

Councilman Marrone: Does not support sending donation letters to local businesses when they are alternatives for acquiring funding for a certain event.

Mayor Horton: According Council that the money received will be going to the general Community Affairs Account.

Councilman Marrone: In that case, requests that future donation letters to say that donations are going to general Community Affairs, instead of a specific event. If he donated to a specific cause, would want the donation to actually be dedicated to the cause.

Mayor Horton: Noted that his notion will be considered.

Council President LaRotonda: Stated that the event was great last year, and hopes this year the Brunch will be equally successful.

Councilwoman Cain – Economic Development: She and Councilmembers Clark and Marrone met for their meeting yesterday evening. They discussed looking into the ACEA to see whether they would be interested in coming to the City for a presentation to decide whether they would be a good fit for our community. Will follow up with the ACEA after Budget discussions have completed. The quote provided to the City last year was not an unreasonable cost, so further conversation will be needed about future possibilities. J. Thompson emailed the local cannabis business owners. One response stated that they are getting their final items in order for inspection, and then they would move onto the state level. Some cannabis-related businesses are open in other local municipalities. Looking forward to the revenue that the businesses will bring in to Absecon. Announced a new flower shop, named "Blooms," opening Downtown. Oddball Vintage is looking into hosting "Second Sunday" markets again. Asked whether a resolution would need to be approved.

Council President LaRotonda: Spoke with the City's Code Enforcement Officer and Construction Official who indicated they would modify the ordinance, however, for now, a resolution must be completed.

Councilwoman Cain: A couple other businesses in the works include Royal Bine Brewery and Jersey Cow. Next meeting will be April 3rd at 6PM.

Councilman Light: Residents have asked why Absecon doesn't have a Chamber of Commerce, or one central point of contact for local/community events.

Councilwoman Cain: Reminded Councilman Light that last meeting she had mentioned that they were looking into re-establishing the ABCD, which is the like an Absecon Chamber of Commerce.

Councilman Marrone: Clarified that they are working on the matter, but currently focused on the preliminary steps.

Councilman DeRose – Public Safety: Clarified that he was not involved in any fundraising or donation letters.

Mayor Horton: Pointed out that he discussed it within conversation about the Art Alliance.

Councilman DeRose: Clarified further that the discussion in question occurred after-the-fact. Next meeting will be April 1st at 6PM. Highlighted that the Absecon FD is looking into purchasing a boat (with their own money), and thanked Police Officers present for their help in the process.

Councilman DeRose: Cheered for the Lady Panthers (Absecon's 7th/8th grade basketball team).

Chief Laughlin: Announced to the public, and specifically Absecon residents, that official door-to-

door solicitors will have City-issued badges on them identifying them as legitimate. Believes only one solicitor has been approved so far this year. Asked the City Clerk for confirmation.

C. Crone: Indicated that one badge has been issued to an employee of Trinity Solar.

Chief Laughlin: Asked the public to please reach out to the Police Dept. if there are people solicitating without proper badges. Explained a recent case in which a resident called the police about a suspicious solicitor, and it turns out they were part of a fraudulent company, whose network spans the entire east coast, and so the Police were able to apprehend the solicitor before they were able to steal money from any local residents. Warned the public that these dangerous are, in fact, out there and ready to prey those who are unsuspecting. Encouraged the public to call if they have any suspicion and a patrolperson will investigate.

Council President LaRotonda: Indicated that other municipalities share who is allowed to Solicit and the exact duration, on their website.

Chief Laughlin: Reiterated that only one has been approved, and that the City usually does not issue many at all. Made it clear that the company in possession of a legitimate badge now, is Trinity Solar. It is very easy to identify who is legitimate and who is not, because any legitimate solicitor will have their badge on display for residents to see.

Councilman DeRose: Reminded the public that they are always encouraged to come to Council and Public Safety Committee Meetings. Has received positive follow-up from residents about local Police conduct and involvement in community affairs.

Council President LaRotonda: Thanked the Absecon PD for all their hard work, especially in recent weeks. Also thanked the PD for acquiring a temporary camera for Downtown New Jersey Ave., which has brought significant comfort to many nearby businesses.

Chief Laughlin: Admitted they were lucky to have the opportunity to use the camera. It was a result of good business between the Absecon PD and that company and they offered it, knowing that there had been several issues in that area and that the PD was diligent in monitoring it.

PRESENTATION – Atlantic County Sheriff – Joseph O'Donoghue: Announced that the County is in crisis. Claimed a huge influx of illegal immigrants have come to the motels on the White Horse Pike and also in Egg Harbor Township. Stated that local crime rates have risen so much so that residents are fearful to travel locally. Had the pleasure and honor of meeting with Absecon Police Chief Laughlin and his Police Dept. Noted their dedication and service. Urged everyone to uphold their Police at all costs. Announced that the County Sheriff's Office has entered a new era of "Law & Order and Public Safety." Cautioned that there are 7k active warrants within the county.

Emphasized the importance of cooperation among Police Agencies. Commended Chief Laughlin's commitment to duty. Praised the City of Absecon and its community. Vowed as County Sheriff, that he is committed to the Police Chief and will provide him any resources requested, including officers. Believes in the Primary Jurisdiction Rule. Respected that Absecon is Chief Laughlin's city. Pleaded for the public to heed the Police Chief's words. Stated that many nearby municipalities have succumbed to overwhelming crime and danger. Explained the strategy of policing required (e.g. old-school policing, public appearance, public trust/understanding, etc.) Committed his agency to complete support for Chief Laughlin and the entire the Absecon Police. Mentioned the wide-spread difficulty in hiring police officers and the resultant consequences. Urged bi-partisan support for the Police and general cooperation. Pointed out that crime is an issue plaguing the country on a federal level. Emphasized the importance of focusing on the County and municipalities within. Addressed problems of which originated in Pleasantville, but have since spread to Absecon. Stressed that collaborative discussion with Council, and especially the Police Chief, is important. Applauded Chief Laughlin's dedicated work, despite limited access to resources, and pointing out how the public has put their trust and faith in him.

Council President LaRotonda: Thanked Sheriff O'Donoghue for his dedication for presenting in Absecon tonight. Looks forward to future collaboration between the Absecon PD and the Sheriff Office.

Councilman Marrone: Thanked Sheriff O'Donoghue for maintaining his word and speaking in

Absecon tonight.

Sheriff O'Donoghue: Pledged, again, his unfaltering commitment. Warned Council about the risk of paying no heed to their Police Chiefs. Thanked Chief Laughlin and his Dept. for their warm hospitality and fraternal friendship. Thanked B. Blaney for his assistance, noting that he is wise Counsel.

Councilmembers: Thanked Sheriff O'Donoghue again.

Chief Laughlin: Thanked Sheriff O'Donoghue for coming to Absecon today. Spoke on Monday about the matters he and the Sheriff have been dealing with. Mentioned that the current agency will be taking an approach different to that taken by previous predecessors. Looks forward for the Absecon PD to work with the Sheriff's Office.

Council President LaRotonda: Commended the collaboration as "forward-thinking."

Council President LaRotonda: Announced that the Fire Co. will host an Oktoberfest this upcoming October.

Councilman Marrone – Public Works/Code Enforcement: The Committee, including some residents, met on Monday. Had a lengthy conversation about flooding issues during significant rain (i.e. at 4th Ave. & Sooy Lane.) Spent majority of the meeting discussing possible solutions. E. Dennis will be looking into the matter further. Still awaiting a timeline for the raising of Shore Rd. Have not received any significant updates about the Shore Rd. Project nor about the Streetscape Project.

E. Dennis: Announced that the Streetscape Project is out to bid presently. The Bid opening will be on March 28th.

Councilman Marrone: On Highland Blvd & Seaside Ave. there is a road sign which abuts a residential property, and they have requested it be moved. The City discovered they are within their right to make such a change, so E. Dennis and L. Jones will collaborate to decide where the sign will be moved. Next meeting will be April 1st at 5PM. Encouraged the public come for Public Works and stay for Public Safety (afterwards).

Councilman Clark – Finance: The first meeting consisted of mostly signing bills. However, there will be a Budget Meeting next Thursday at 6PM. The "real" first Finance Meeting will then be on March 21st at 5:30PM.

Councilman Light – Parks & Playgrounds: Asked Councilman Marrone whether the new crosswalk signs were still blocked by other signage.

Councilman Marrone: Has not yet discussed the matter with L. Jones. Stated that he would reach out to him.

Councilman Light: Met on the 20th at 7PM. Topics of conversation included band selection for the City's Concerts in the Park, cracks on the tennis court at Pitney Park – currently working on solution, light outages in Heritage Park, Community Garden approval, and an Eagle Scout Project regarding a solar-powered cellphone station. Believes a solar-powered cellphone station would be a good addition to Heritage Park, however admitted caution about the possibility that the stations may attract a mischievous crowd. Emphasized the need for strategy. Intends to collaborate with key decision-makers in further discussion.

Councilman DeRose: Asked what the Field of Dream's thoughts were on the idea.

Councilman Light: Someone was concerned that there is enough activity there now and did not want to attract more potentially risky activity. There was also a concern about the proposed location at the parking lot.

Councilman DeRose: Suggested for the Eagle Scout to consider installing at the train station. Noted that it would not encourage unsafe activity in the City's parks, but that the Eagle Scout would need to contact Transit.

Councilman Light: Clarified that this project would secure the individual's Eagle Scout status.

Council President LaRotonda: Asked what the deadline is for this decision.

Councilman Light: Estimated about a month prior. He has already met with Mr. O'Hagan in Construction. Personally, favors the idea of installing the station at Heritage Park near the gazebo and other amenities.

Council President LaRotonda: Asked about the station's mobility.

Councilman Light: According to the diagrams, would say the structure dimensions seem to be about 4FTx 6-8FT x 10FT. Suggested possibly including a park walking map on the structure. Suspects the structure will be concreted into the ground, so if needed to be moved, they would have to unearth the concrete and move to another location.

Council President LaRotonda: Requested Councilman Light send the information he has to the other Councilmembers so they may get a better understanding.

Councilman Light: Continued on to report that Marsh Madness begins this week and they are looking for volunteers. Encouraged the public to come out and support. Next meeting will be March 19th.

J. Thompson – Admin/CFO: Significant focus is currently on the Budget. Reiterated that there will be a Budget Meeting next week, and that the City expects to introduce the Budget at the Meeting on March 21st. The yearly Tax Sale is scheduled for March 20th and will be on the City's website. Received notification early that day from the NJDOT that the Route 30 Bridge over Beach Thorofare will have temporary overnight closures beginning tonight through next week, for repairs. Advised taking alternative routes.

Mayor Kim Horton: Thanked Chief Laughlin and Lt. Heunke for taking the time to reassure businesses on New Jersey Ave., that the City's Police Dept. is committed to their safety. Commended Lt. Heunke for hand-providing each business a phone number they may call for help. Thanked Councilmembers, Police Officers, and Police Chief for taking the time to participate in the schools' Read Across America Day and encourage reading. She explained that she, herself, read a book at the school and had a wonderful time interacting with the students.

Council President LaRotonda: Added that he, too, read a book to a classroom for Read Across America and had a great time as well.

E. Dennis – City Engineer: Spoke to the County earlier about an update for the Shore Rd. Project and they assured him that they would speak to their contact about it tomorrow and provide an update. In regard to the 2023 Road Program, all that is remaining is work on Highland Blvd. A gas conflict has been resolved and their drainage work is complete. The concrete crew will return and after paving is finalized the project will be complete. Reiterated that the Streetscape Project is out to bid. The bids will be reviewed at the Public Works Meeting on the following Monday (28th), with the hope that they will be able to award at the next Council Meeting (hoping work will begin sometime in April). Two projects about to begin include the Heritage Park Utilities Project and the Sidewalk Project near the 9/11 Memorial. Lastly, the next Road Program is active, so the Public Works Committee will soon be deciding which roads are to be focused on in 2024.

Councilman DeRose: In regard to the new White Horse Liquors, asked why the White Horse Pike entrance was still blocked.

E. Dennis: Explained that entrances are closed on Route 30 because the developers had a drainage issue and so the NJDOT prohibited them from opening the entrances until any issues were resolved. According to the developer, however, the NJDOT just granted the approval required. Expecting the drainage work to be completed sometime in April. Then the DOT will need to approve the entrance opening.

Councilman Light: Asked about the overgrowth in the area.

E. Dennis: Clarified that the property belongs to NJDOT.

Council President LaRotonda: Indicated that he would reach out to Government Affairs.

PUBLIC PORTION

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

Sandy Hickerson – 210 Oakland Avenue: Acknowledged dangerous incidents that occurred in Absecon. Emphasized the need to be and feel safe, especially for single women. Is the Assist. State Director for Woman for Gun Rights, and, in light of recent events, is now planning to host a class for people to obtain their FID. Mentioned that more information about FIDs is available on the State Police website. The event she plans to co-host a Situational Awareness Class with the Sheriff's Dept. Respects that some people are not interested in learning how to use firearms, so there will be other businesses present who can help ensure safety in a way that does not require the use of guns (e.g. martial arts, Damsel in Defense, etc.) The aim to spread information to everyone in the public, both men and women. The details are being finalized, but the scheduled date is for April 6th. Praised Absecon Council for reaching out to Sheriff O'Donoghue. Was relieved to hear that their concerns mirrored her own, and that action was being taken to address them. Thanked Council for reaching out to the Sheriff's Office. Also thanked Mayor Horton, Chief Laughlin, and Lt. Heunke for going around to meet local business owners, in light of recent events. Shared that their visit was very comforting to the local businesses. Expressed her general appreciation for all their hard work.
Chief Laughlin: Affirmed that Police Officers have been patrolling New Jersey Ave. and interacting with local business. Thanked S. Hickerson for noticing and appreciating their work.

Motioned to close to the public: Councilman Light; Seconded: Councilwoman Parker
All in Favor, None Opposed.

CLOSED SESSION - #60-2024

- **Contract Negotiation – PBA Ratification**
- **Possible Litigation**

B. Blaney: In accordance with the Open Records Act N.J.S.A. 10:4-6, the City Council went into Closed Session. Closed Session is to discuss contract negotiations and possible litigation. There may be action taken after the Session.

Motioned to enter Closed Session: Councilman Marrone; Seconded: Councilman Light
All in Favor, None Opposed.

(Closed Session)

Motioned to adjourn Closed Session and re-enter the meeting: Councilman Light; Seconded: Councilman Marrone
All in Favor, None Opposed.

ADJOURNMENT

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

Respectfully submitted,


Carie A. Crone, City Clerk

Approved: 5-16-24