



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

APRIL 1, 2021

REGULAR MEETING MINUTES

The meeting was called to order by Council President, Bennett at 5:30 p.m.

FLAG SALUTE

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

ROLL CALL

PRESENT: Burroughs, Cain, Cavileer, Howell, Larotonda, Light, Bennett

ABSENT:

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

2021 RESOLUTIONS OUT OF CONSENT

69 Allowing the Budget to be read by title only.

Motion to move – councilman Larotonda – second – Councilwoman Howell

Roll Call: Burroughs, yes; Cain, yes; Cavileer, yes; Howell, yes; Larotonda, yes; Light, yes; Bennett, yes

PUBLIC HEARING – 2021 MUNICIPAL BUDGET

Motion to open to the public – Councilman Light – second – Councilwoman Cain
All were in favor.

Judy Courter – 615 Hay Road – asked if the budget was getting passed tonight.

Keith – said it was and that we are looking at 1.5 cent tax increase for the year. Maybe we should get an explanation before any public comment.

Jessica – the 1.5 cents is \$107,000, which is to offset the pension increase for this year. Pension costs continue to escalate due to the issues at the State level, and are most likely going to keep going up. We want to be able to cover the pension, so we aren't in a negative position next year. It's an increase of \$30.00 on a home assessed at \$200,000. Our revenues decreased substantially

in 2020 as a direct result of the pandemic and they are anticipated to be lower in 2021 as well. Due to the school budget increases over the years, we are able to adjust our school tax reserve to free up some surplus funds to assist with balancing the budget for other items that have increased beyond the pension. The budget is utilizing \$1,500,000 of surplus and it's becoming increasingly difficult to regenerate revenue in the difficult economic times. We have not been given any official information of how the stimulus funds can be used in our budget, when we can expect the funds and how they can be implemented, so we really can't consider those funds in this budget. She then gave some highlights of the budget. We will be continuing all personnel and services, including the increase of personnel in the police and dispatch from last year and the addition of a seasonal public works position. We have the purchase of a Pierce multi-use fire truck; two new police vehicles; updated body worn cameras; our road program; the next step for the dredging project; the flooding issue on Shore Road and Ohio Avenue and traffic light control at several intersections used for public safety.

Keith – this raise comes to \$30.00 for the year for a home assessed at \$200,000. The \$107,000 is needed for the pension hike and we're using \$1,500,000 of our surplus funds.

Mike Cesaro – Auditor – the tax levy that you're proposing is \$30,000 less than the one you had in 2013.

You've done a great job keeping the tax levy down, but unfortunately due to costs the city can't control, you have to raise it.

Judy Courter – she used to be a budget and credit counselor as a volunteer and understands a city budget is different. It's amazing to have a substantial surplus and asked if part of it is used every year for the budget?

Keith – yes, part of it is used. Having a healthy surplus enables us to borrow at a better rate.

Jessica – our surplus was \$2,100,000.00 and we had a resolution to add, \$800,000 to it by increasing a reserve from the school tax. It's less than we had in previous years and the more we use each year to balance the budget, the more you will need to continue to need each year. We are having struggles with revenue due to the pandemic and we haven't received any more state aid since 2012. Even with this levy, we are lower than we were in 2013.

Judy – appreciated the explanation and for answering her questions. Her husband couldn't make the meeting, but he wrote a letter and she read it.

Nick – confirmed with Jessica that if we use the \$107,000 to offset the budget, we will still have an additional \$100,000 over last year's surplus.

Jessica – yes, however the surplus was increased using the school reserve. Information received about the stimulus funds indicate that funds are not to be used for tax relief. If we were to use more surplus, she believes it would appear as if we were doing so to lower taxes, and that we might be required to pay the money back. The stimulus plan was released after we introduced the budget.

Mike Cesaro – regarding the American Rescue Plan monies, at this point in time, it has not been released as to what it can be used for. It's been made clear that the monies couldn't be used for pensions and alluded to not to be used for tax relief. It does say it can be used for loss of revenue, so there is a potential that we may be able for the hotel tax and other revenues that we lost, we may get it back through the aid. It was said not to hold up budgets, because there is no money to anticipate in the budget since we don't know when they are coming in. We could receive 50% in 2021 and the balance in 2022. If we spend it on something now that we aren't allowed, we'd have to pay it back. The policy is not to use more than 50% of the surplus and it is correct that you get a better bond rating as well.

Rich DeRose – 43 Natalie Terrace – feels raising taxes unnecessarily, especially during a pandemic is not a way to a promising future of Absecon. We need to attract new business and families and the next generation of public servants to serve this great community. The budget meeting was confusing and nothing was accomplished during the public discussion. He had hoped

that someone would give a user-friendly justification, which he thanked Keith for doing tonight. He looked at the budget and he found it confused him and motivated him to come to the meeting. He doesn't see why the taxes needed to be raised and to what our community would gain. He hopes they feel about the people that voted for them and those that need your help. He took the time to come tonight, but he spoke on behalf of others who can't make a 5:30 meeting.

Sandy Hickerson – 210 Upland Ave. – appreciates everything that council does and she lives with her mother who is on a fixed income and we don't have a lot of money. We all have bills to pay and you're saying it's not a lot of money, but we live pay check to pay check. It's hard trying to make ends meet. If there is any way you can do anything with the budget, she'd appreciate it.

Harry Hartman - 632 Woodland Ave. – he feels it's disingenuous when you talk about scrutinizing a budget and squeezing the nickels and dimes and then turn around say we are buying a fire truck and two more police cars. We know the increase is probably not a lot of money, but it's symbolic and it means something to people and your priorities and where you're going and what you feel is important. What message are you sending to your constituents? He knows they are needed, but to the citizens, they don't see that. You're spending \$2,000,000 and you're arguing about \$107,000. He feels the timing is terrible to see the truck and police cars in the budget.

Keith – the fire department has requested a new truck for years and about 2 ½ years ago, we hired professionals to review and report back and it's time now to get it. The current one is a 1988 and it needs to be replaced.

Carie read from the Zoom questions – **Greg Seher**-Can members of the finance committee provide some elaboration on why they are endorsing the budget with a tax increase and what options they considered and evaluated to try to avoid a tax increase.

Caleb Cavileer – what concerns him the most is the fund balance and it has nearly doubled the last two years in order to balance the budget where it's at. What was roughly \$700,000 taken from the fund balance in 2020 became \$1,500,000 this year. In order to do that last year, the CFO was able to find a source of funding within our sewer account, which was a one-time thing. Now this year, we're taking \$800,000 from the school reserve to offset the taxes, he feels that is a one-time thing.

Jessica – we would have been facing a much higher tax increase and taken these actions that Caleb highlighted in order to bring it to the 1.5 cents. If we hadn't done some of these things, we would have come in with a higher tax increase.

Zoom – Greg Seher - I believe that I just heard that our fund balance will be higher this year compared to last, even if we use it to avoid a tax increase? Is that correct? And thank you for the elaboration.

Jessica – we are talking about what is remaining from after the amount that we use in the budget. That might have been higher now, but that's only after we put the \$800,000 in that we took off of the school reserve. It would not have been higher, if we didn't take that action.

Steve – thanked everyone for their patience and understanding. Last year we actually pulled back on the road project and he was actually considering doing it this year. If it was his way, as an old motorhead, we'd try to squeeze a little bit more time out of the fire truck, but there is a precedent that over so many years, it needs to be taken out of service within reason.

Motion to close public – Councilman Larotonda – second – Councilman Burroughs
All were in favor.

70 Adopting the 2021 Municipal Budget.

Motion to move Resolution #70 – Councilman Burroughs – second – Councilman Cavileer

Roll Call: Burroughs, yes; Cain, yes; Cavileer, yes; Howell, yes; Larotonda, no; Light, yes; Bennett, yes, but said that \$30 is a lot to certain people and it's not taken lightly and his yes vote shouldn't indicate that it is taken lightly

2021 ORDINANCE FOR INTRODUCTION

- 07** Bond Ordinance providing for various 2021 Capital acquisitions and improvements by and in the City of Absecon, County of Atlantic, State of New Jersey; appropriating \$2,245,000 therefore and authorizing the issuance of \$2,132,750 Bonds or Notes to finance part of the cost therefor.

Motion to move – Councilman Light – second – Councilman Burroughs

Jessica – this bond will include all the items we just discussed that were put into the capital portion of the budget and by introducing it tonight, we can move the process along and to start the projects. They include: the road program; the fire truck; the police cars; the body cameras; the traffic light control system; the Shore Road flooding mediation; and the dredging.

Roll Call: Burroughs, yes; Cain, yes; Cavileer, yes; Howell, yes; Larotonda, yes; Light, yes; Bennett, yes

CONSENT AGENDA

Motion to remove #74 from the consent agenda and vote separately was made by Councilwoman Cain – second – Councilman Larotonda

All were in favor.

- 71** Permitting a Charitable Organization to solicit funds, namely the Absecon Blue Devils.

- 72** Approving the insertion of a Special Item of Revenue into the 2021 Municipal Budget to allow for the receipt of \$10,510.08 from the State of New Jersey Recycling Tonnage Grant.

Jessica – this is a grant we get most years for the recycling. It is the lowest that we've received in many years. It's usually around \$12,000 and it's been up to \$15,000 to \$19,000, but with the drop in people recycling, the grants are lower.

- 73** Appointing a Public Works Laborer/Operator, namely David Garfinkel.

- 75** Authorizing an amendment to the Redevelopment Agreement with Absecon Urban Renewal, LLC, the Redeveloper for Block 203 Redevelopment Area.

Eddie – we have several agreements executed with the redeveloper and one of the provisions in one of them deals with our chosen redeveloper who is in charge of redeveloping the entire site. It deals with him transferring a piece of that site to another entity. There is a Firestone who has started construction and their portion now needs to be conveyed to them so they can finish and open. They will still have to follow all the same rules.

Keith – other towns utilize this and it will limit public comment to a 5-minute period. It's to protect in essence somebody from getting up to the microphone for 45 minutes to an hour and they could be commenting on one specific item and you might have other people who wanted to speak, but didn't want to wait that long. It will be one time for each public portion, one that is for the agenda items and the second one is for any other general questions or comments.

Motion to open to the public – Councilman Councilwoman Howell – second – Councilman Larotonda
All were in favor.

Harry Hartman – so you're going to restrict people to five minutes? If it's agenda items and they have more than one to address, they have to plan to get it all done in 5 minutes?

Keith – whoever is running the meeting has the discretion.

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

CONSENT AGENDA - Resolutions were read again.

Motion to move consent agenda – Councilman Light – second – Councilwoman Cain

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

- 74** Authorizing Remington & Vernick, City Engineers to provide professional services related to the proposed Major Subdivision along New York Avenue.

Keith – he pulled it out of the consent agenda so council could speak about it

Steve – he's had several calls and concerns about the process of this project and is it a go once we hired the engineer. This was to use the land that we have to help develop parts of our town where people might want to put a home on it. If we encourage that, we can help our city. He was in favor of a plan to see how many vacant lots we have throughout town, where it could happen.

Keith – on May 20th, the two lots on Blenheim Avenue that was the old Girl Scout building will go up for auction again.

Eddie – there is a lengthy engineering process, but there will be a Planning Board hearing and an option for the public to have input.

Keith – he personally thinks this is a great time for us to look into doing this. If this passes tonight, we would set up a committee and finding out what we want to do there.

Sandy – agrees with Keith and that it's a great opportunity. The housing market is low now. If the high school changes, we are hoping more people will want to come here.

Steve – this not something that just came up. We are revisiting it and some people who live there probably already knew it was a possibility.

Motion to move Res. #74 – Councilman Larotonda – second – Councilwoman Cain

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

APPROVAL OF BILL LIST - \$339,665.92

Motion to approve – Councilman Cavileer – second – Councilman Burroughs

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

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Regular Meeting Minutes – 3/18/2021

Motion to approve – Councilman Light – second – Councilman Burroughs

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

REPORTS

Jessica – we are getting closer to having our new website completed. The calendar and email alerts are not going to be active until we actually roll over with the new website. Once that happens, you will need to sign up again on the new website and it will be easy to find on the website.

Everyone should be happy with the new one. Our newsletter is on the current website now and in the lobby. The electronic tax sale is on April 14 and there are about 28 properties on it and there are 12 tax appeals this year. This shows the strength of the community. The spring curb-side leaf pickup starts April 12th and the cleanup day and shredding is April 24th from 9 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

Keith – a couple of weeks ago, there was a group that held a clean up day and he commended them for doing it. There is a business on NJ Avenue whose trash has blown all over the street after it was cleaned up. He wants that store held accountable and something needs to be done.

Jessica – we plan on having an ordinance for introduction by next meeting dealing with the shopping carts.

Eddie – at the new firehouse, we continue to work on the close out process. On a typical road project punch list, we might have 10-20 items to be addressed. On the firehouse, we had 300. Half are finished, but we had an issue between the general contractor and some of his sub-contractors, but Mr. Scerni's office have assisted in that matter and it looks like we have things moving again. A construction fence has been put up around the old firehouse and they are scheduled to demolish on Monday. The 2021 road program has been sent to the DOT for authorization to bid, so we are ahead of the game. We should be able to award a contract at the second meeting in May and construction during the summer. Some of the streets were affected by the gas company work over the year and the roads on the list are: Coolidge Avenue from Austin to Bayview Drive; Cordova Drive from Shore Road to Lisbon Avenue; Creek Court from 4th Avenue to the end of the cul de sac; West Faunce Landing Road from Pitney Road to Shore Road; Hobart Avenue from Pitney Road to Irelan Avenue; Lazy Lane from Sooy Lane to Hay Road; Sooy Lane from midway down to one way portion to 4th Avenue; Woodcrest Avenue from Pitney Road to New York Avenue; and a couple of small projects that we do as part of the program – sidewalk on Ambassador Drive from the WaWa intersection up along this property connecting to the path at Heritage Park; finish off the driveway at the Legion on Mill Road; the first phase of drainage improvements at the intersection of Hobart Avenue and Davis, which has been a long standing drainage problem. It will probably be a three-phase project because it's pretty significant. Sidewalk on the other side of Pitney Road to build on to what was done last year; the opposite side of the school from the Pitney Park driveway down to Woodcrest Avenue. It all adds up to almost a mile and half worth of road, which all go to the quality and safety of the town.

Mayor – thanked April Elias for initiating the NJ Ave. clean up and thanked Bob Battista for securing all the equipment necessary to hold this event and Councilman Cavileer did a great job advertising it. She thanked the painter's union for painting the bathrooms at the Legion; the only cost to the Legion was the paint. Thanked the Art Alliance for the Easter Egg Hunt they held. Her, Betty, Caleb and Steve attended the swearing in of the newest inductees in the junior national honor society. This was the second annual event that the students planned and it was outstanding. Thanked Chief Laughlin and his department; no matter the event or circumstance, they are out there keeping us safe and we are all grateful. She thanked Jessica and the staff that provide excellent service to our residents every day; they are a small group but very efficient. She wished everyone a Happy Easter and a Passover last weekend.

PUBLIC PORTION

Motion to open to the public – Councilwoman Horton – second – Councilman Larotonda
All were in favor.

Rich DeRose – the Absecon Monopoly game was awesome. Do we know when the Royal Farms will be complete? Eddie doesn't know, but they want to build it more than we want it built. They need to get it up and running. He expects they will move fast.

Harry Hartman – wanted to know how the NY subdivision get started again.

Keith – a few weeks ago at our agenda meeting, it was mentioned by our engineer about this plan that was done about 15 years ago.

Harry – mentioned property that is city owned by him and is concerned that once this gets going, more will happen. Part of our charm is having trees. The property behind him had a moratorium put on it and residents were to be notified if the city was going to do anything. Asked Council to be careful about selling property.

Judy Courter – how many lots are mentioned? Eddie – the plan shows 15-16, but it's not set in stone and the designs can change as to sizes, but consistent with the character of that neighborhood.

Rose Hickerson – 210 Upland Ave. – her street had some gas company work and some of the sidewalk across the street had to be replaced, but they didn't do that, they put black top. Eddie told her that is only temporary and they will be back to finish it correctly.

Sandy Hickerson – commended the fire department and the past couple of mornings, Shop Rite needed their assistance. Our firefighters are amazing and knew that the problem was the carbon monoxide detectors malfunctioning. They know their stuff and are professional. She mentioned that when you go on tv to watch the council meetings, there is an issue with the audio. You can't hear anything.

Keith – tried to contact Comcast, but it's hard to get a person. But they know it needs to get fixed.

Sandy – gave a shout out to the ACUA for last week when the wind was bad, and they put her cans in her fenced in yard, so they wouldn't blow around. They do a good job.

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

Steve – thanked the citizens who come out and really care and engaged in our community and keeping us in line and everything in check. It doesn't go unnoticed. We respect your opinion and your time.

Everyone was wished a Happy Easter

ADJOURNMENT

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

Respectfully submitted,



Carie A. Crone, City Clerk

Approved: 4-15-21