



CITY OF ABSECON
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CITY COUNCIL
REGULAR MEETING
APRIL 18TH, 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, City CFO/Administrator Jessica Thompson, City Engineer Ed Dennis, City Solicitor Bill Blaney Esq., Dep. City Clerk Mary Fetske, and Police Chief J.R. Laughlin

REGULAR MEETING AGENDA

2024 RESOLUTIONS OUT OF CONSENT

72 Allowing the Budget to be read by title only.

Motioned to move Resolution #72-2024: Councilman Light; Seconded: Councilman DeRose
Roll Call: Cain – Yes; Clark – Yes; DeRose – Yes; Light – Yes; Marrone – Yes; Parker – Yes; LaRotonda – Yes

PUBLIC HEARING – 2024 MUNICIPAL BUDGET

Jessica Thompson: The Budget is \$12,280,261.02. A detailed overview was provided last meeting when the Budget was introduced. This budget includes a 4-cent increase and includes expanded Public Safety services, which requires a municipal tax increase.

Motioned to open the Hearing to the Public: Councilman Light; Seconded: Councilman Marrone
All in favor, none opposed.

Greg Seher – 65 Yarmouth Avenue: Recognized that Public Safety increased the budget but asked whether the City looked if there were any places they could decrease the budget to avoid an overall increase.

Councilman DeRose: Confirmed all avenues were pursued. Shared that Council took a pay cut, for the first time ever. It is hard to make any cuts, considering inflation and the general financial climate.

Councilman Clark: Emphasized the impact of inflation, the rise of costs and salaries. Assured G. Seher that the City went line-by-line to find areas in which they could potentially save.

Council President LaRotonda: Highlighted the positive aspects of the budget, specifically City's 4-year contract with their Police Dept., a long-time agreement with EMS, adding to the Police Force, and continuous improvement in infrastructure and recreation.

Councilman Marrone: Emphasized that the recreation improvements are results from money re-allocation, and not from any tax increase. Their money re-allocation will allow the City to make certain investments which will prevent them from incurring future debt.

Motioned to close the Hearing to the Public: Councilman Light; Seconded: Councilwoman Parker
All in favor, none opposed.

2024 RESOLUTIONS OUT OF CONSENT

73 Authorizing Self-Examination of the 2024 Budget.

Motioned to move Resolution #73-2024: Councilman Marrone; Seconded: Councilman Light
Roll Call: Cain – Yes; Clark – Yes; DeRose – Yes; Light – Yes; Marrone – Yes; Parker – Yes; LaRotonda – Yes

74 Adopting the 2024 Municipal Budget.

Motioned to move Resolution #74-2024: Councilman DeRose; Seconded: Councilwoman Parker
Roll Call: Cain – No;

Councilman Clark: Asked clarification as to whether Councilwoman Cain was naying the entire budget.

Councilman Marrone: Pointed out that Councilwoman Cain voted 'no' on the budget that she attended all the meetings for.

Council President LaRotonda: Asked what changed Councilwoman Cain's mind about the budget. Mentioned that at the Council's final Budget meeting, during a poll, she voted in favor for adopting the budget. Noted her absence from the Council Meeting during which the Budget was introduced.

Councilwoman Cain: Asserted that she is within her right to change her mind. Commented that other Councilmembers did so when discussing the City's sewer budget.

Council President LaRotonda: Suggested Councilwoman Cain voted in opposition to public safety.

Councilwoman Cain: Denied. Suggested that the City should have come up with better options to lower the overall budget.

Council President LaRotonda: Asked why she had not suggested an alternative option at an earlier time. Suggested the vote to be politically motivated.

Roll Call (continued); Clark – Yes; DeRose – Yes; Light – Yes; Marrone – Yes; Parker – Yes; LaRotonda – Yes

Councilman DeRose: Emphasized that the City's Finance Committee consists of himself, and Councilmembers Clark and Cain. The Budget is not presented to the City's Governing Body until he, and Councilmembers Clark and Cain, vote in favor of its approval. Emphasized that the Finance Committee dedicates hours of discussion, research, and questions in the Budget process. At no

point, did Councilwoman ever raise a concern or make an indication that she was unhappy with the Budget determined.

Councilmembers DeRose, Clark, and Marrone: Expressed shock.

2024 ORDINANCES FOR INTRODUCTION

Motioned for the first reading of Ordinance #13-2024: Councilman Light; Seconded: Councilman Clark

- 13** Bond Ordinance providing for the 2024 Road Improvement Program, appropriating \$1,000,000 therefor and authorizing the issuance of \$950,000 Bonds or Notes of the City to finance part of the cost thereof.

J. Thompson: Bond Ordinance is for the 2024 Road Program only. All other bond projects are covered by the Capital Budget Ordinance. The Public Works Committee had decided what the 2024 Road Program will consist of.

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

This Ordinance will be posted, laid over, and published according to law. A Public Hearing, second, and final reading will be held on May 2nd, 2024.

2024 ORDINANCES FOR ADOPTION

Motioned for the second reading of Ordinance #11-2024: Councilman Light; Seconded: Councilman Marrone

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

- 11** Amending the Code of the City of Absecon, Chapter 254 thereof titled Peace and Good Order.

Motioned to open the meeting to the public for comment or discussion of Ordinance #11-2024: Councilman DeRose; Seconded: Councilman Light. All in Favor, None Opposed.

G. Seher – 65 Yarmouth Avenue: Requested clarification.

Council President LaRotonda: Explained that the City reviewed some outdated Codes and this is just to update language.

B. Blaney: Reiterated that there were some outdated/presently-unlawful Codes, so they were reviewed. A general Code update continues to be in the works, however, certain Codes deserved immediate addressment. Ordinance #12 also pertains to such outdated and unlawful Codes.

G. Seher: Asked for specific examples of “peace and order.”

Council President LaRotonda: Expressed intention to soon update all the City’s Codes.

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

Motioned for the final reading and adoption of Ordinance #11-2024: Councilwoman Parker; Seconded: Councilman Marrone

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

Ordinance #11-2024 has been heard and is finally approved.

Motioned for the second reading of Ordinance #12-2024: Councilwoman Parker; Seconded: Councilman Light
Roll Call: Cain – Yes; Clark – Yes; DeRose – Yes; Light – Yes; Marrone – Yes; Parker – Yes; LaRotonda – Yes

- 12** Amending the Code of the City of Absecon, Chapter 230 thereof titled Loitering and Graffiti.

Motioned to open the meeting to the public for comment or discussion of Ordinance #12-2024:
Councilman DeRose; Seconded: Councilwoman Parker
All in Favor, None Opposed.

No Discussion.

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

Motioned for the final reading and adoption of Ordinance #12-2024: Councilman Marrone;
Seconded: Councilwoman Parker
Roll Call: Cain – Yes; Clark – Yes; DeRose – Yes; Light – Yes; Marrone – Yes; Parker – Yes; LaRotonda – Yes

Ordinance #12-2024 has been heard and is finally approved.

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.

- 75** Approving the Insertion of a Special Item of Revenue into the 2024 Municipal Budget to allow for the receipt of \$12,444.72 from the State of New Jersey Recycling Tonnage Grant.
- 76** Authorizing the Tax Collector to prorate a portion of the 2nd Quarter Taxes of 2024 and cancel the property taxes for 2024 Final/2025 Preliminary on the Property located at 225 W. Wyoming Ave.
- 77** Authorizing the City of Absecon to award a contract for CBD Streetscape Improvements – Phase IV

PUBLIC PORTION – (Agenda items only)

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

E. Dennis: Gave an update about the CBD Streetscape Project. Reminded Council that during the last Council Meeting they got approval to reject all the bids previously received. They restructured their bid to give them more options in the base project. The City received 3 bids and what they decided to award is the base bid, which includes the main streetscape work on New Jersey Ave. between Michigan Ave. and Route 9. The bid also includes the resurfacing of the street. The City is not awarded the lighting now, but the conduit will be included so lighting could be a future option.

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

CONSENT AGENDA VOTE

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

APPROVAL OF BILL LIST – \$509,512.22

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

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Closed Session as to form and content only – 2/8/2024

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

REPORTS

Councilman Light – Parks & Playgrounds: Met on April 16th. Topics of conversation included the Heritage Park Concession Stand waterline, Heritage Park light repairs, proposed repairs at the tennis courts, replacement netting at the baseball field, additional lighting at the soccer field bathroom and along the access road, the Eagle Scout Project for a solar cell-phone charging station, and the status of Faunce Landing Boat Ramp. The Green Team spoke about Heritage Park, the Community Garden, grass removal, and a fencing deposit. They expressed concern about tree replacement upon removal. They discussed a Shade Tree Committee option. Thanked all those involved with the Field of Dream, Public Works, and ASAC. Mentioned the upcoming opening day for ASAC. Next meeting will be May 3rd at 7PM. The public is welcome.

Councilwoman Parker – Community Affairs: Have not met since last Council Meeting. Reminded the public that there will be an Earth Day Celebration/community cleanup/shredding event/electronics collection on April 20th from 9AM-12PM. Next meeting will be May 2nd at 5:30PM.

Councilwoman Cain – Economic Development: Have not met since last Council Meeting. Next meeting will be on May 1st at 6PM.

Councilman Light: Mentioned that he met the owner for Jersey Cow earlier that afternoon. Indicated that the owner is very excited for their anticipated opening in Absecon. Noted their expansion throughout the tri-state area.

Councilman DeRose – Public Safety: As a member of the Finance Committee, agrees with Councilwoman Cain, that they each have a right to vote in accordance with how they feel and that they have a right to change their mind/opinion. Referred to the sewer budget vote, when those who opposed the budget's approval provided an explanation for their specific way of voting. Explained that budget process this year was very tough on all Councilmembers. Emphasized their need to

make tough decisions. According to his notes, Councilwoman Cain voiced two concerns with the budget. (1) She felt that the City was paying certain people too much money and (2) the tennis courts. Shared that he agreed with her in regard to the tennis courts, which is why they were looking into grants for the funding. Inquired, again, what Councilwoman Cain's objections were to the budget. Expressed that he was proud of the City's work in coming together to get this Budget accomplished. Has not held a Public Safety meeting since last update. Next meeting will be May 6th at 6PM.

Chief Laughlin: Last week a DOT inspection was conducted on Pitney Road. The State DOT reached out to Absecon and came down with the Division of Taxation. They checked each vehicle driving in traffic. 81 summonses were issued and 3 arrests conducted. Warned the public that the Police are actively conducting strict traffic enforcement. Shared that most of the high-speed traffic stops involve local residents who find it an annoyance when pulled over by the Police after breaking the law. Suggested people give themselves more time so that they do not feel the need to rush when driving. Reminded the public to be aware of pedestrians and children around the roadways. Praised the City's highly trained traffic unit that have investigated many vehicular crashes. Emphasized how terrible the crashes are, especially on streets where drivers reach high speeds. Currently working with the Sheriff and Galloway PD to put together an active patrol on Route 30 to encourage people to slow down. Now until April 30th is the Distracted Driving detail. You do not need to be talking on your cellphone to earn a Distracted Driving ticket. Your phone should be off and silenced. Encouraged the public, again, to "see something, say something." Cautioned that the Police cannot be everywhere at all times. Encouraged those in possible need to reach out. In regard to a recent Police stabbing incident in Galloway, shared that Absecon PD was there immediately, helped the injured Officer with First Aid, and secured the scene. Commended the Police in the City local and nearby.

Councilman DeRose: Emphasized his pride to be the Committee Chairman of Public Safety and to have supported their new and improved contracts.

Councilman Clark: Commented how hard it is to hire new Police Officers.

Councilman Marrone: Emphasized that the new Police Contracts brought the Absecon PD just to the middle of the pack in regard to salaries. Criticized the lackluster contracts of prior years and continued unwillingness, by some, to properly pay for value.

Councilwoman Cain: Affirmed that she was not involved in any previous Police Contracts. Repeated that she does not owe anyone an explanation as to why she voted the way she did. Denied that her decision was totally based on the current Police contract. Commented that Council President LaRotonda voted 'no' to a budget several years prior and everyone respected it as such.

Council President LaRotonda: Clarified that she has yet to provide an explanation for her decision, but stated that they would move on.

Councilman Marrone – Public Works/Code Enforcement: Have not met since last Meeting. Will meet next on May 6th at 5PM. Shared that Councilman Clark invited Council and the Mayor to throw out the first pitch at ASACs Little League Opening Day. Recently has been approached about the possibility of installing speed humps, so expects to discuss that at the next Committee meeting.

Councilman Clark – Finance: The last Finance Meeting included a meeting with the City's new auditor, Jerry to go over the City's recent audit. The meeting had a great showing and conversation. Stated that preparing a municipal budget is difficult. Described his education and experience in Finance. Explained the time and effort he, and Councilman Marrone, put into negotiating the Police Contract. Affirmed that public safety is of the utmost priority. Although no one was happy about the tax increase, it was a necessary evil. Council meet in Committee Meetings, Budget Meetings, Closed Sessions, etc. and it seemed as though everyone had come to an understanding and agreement. Mentioned the City's money re-allocation. Is looking forward to all the positive things the City plans to do with the money included in the Budget.

Councilman Light: Emphasized price increases that have resulted from inflation.

Councilman Clark: Praised everyone's involvement in ASACs Opening Day. Explained that adults and kids alike had an amazing time.

Councilman DeRose: Heard that the Mayor threw a faster pitch than Councilman Marrone.

Councilman Marrone: Confirmed.

Mayor Kim Horton: Thanked Jacob Hackett for inviting her to the Field of Dreams Opening last week (21st year anniversary). The Absecon Police have a wellness program called Operation Lifeline which helps local seniors who live alone, by making sure their wellbeing is ensured every day. Anyone interested can get an application on the Absecon Police Website. Thanked the PD for their heroic action and professionalism, especially during the recent 5-car accident. Assured Chief Laughlin that the residents appreciate him and his department's dedicated hard work.

J. Thompson – City Admin./CFO: Announced that leaf collection has begun and will only last a few weeks this spring. Cautioned that Delaware Ave. will soon be repaved (Mill Rd. to 12th St.) on 4/29. Affected residents will be notified beforehand.

City Clerk: Monthly Report – March 2024

- Municipal Court: \$8,333.17
- Tax Office: \$538,367.61
- Construction Office: \$18,216
- Municipal Clerk's Office: \$7,020

E. Dennis – City Engineer: The Streetscape Project has been awarded and will get the pre-construction meeting scheduled right away. The 2023 Road Program is now substantially completed. The Concession Stand utility work at Heritage Park is also substantially complete. The sidewalk work on Mill Road was expected to be complete by now, but they ran into some insurance issue, which has since been resolved. The plan is to now turn attention to some Capital projects.

Councilman DeRose: Asked about updates regarding the new development entrance on Route 30.

E. Dennis: The developer has shared that he plans to schedule his work at the end of the month. Explained that State approval to conduct the required work is taking a significant amount of time to be issued.

Councilman Marrone: Asked about the raising of Shore Rd.

E. Dennis: Indicated that he would, again, follow up with the County.

Councilman Light: Thanked E. Dennis on correcting a crosswalk sign that needed amending.

Council President LaRotonda: Currently working with City IT and J. Thompson to improve the City's Meeting streaming. Hoping to start the transition by May 2024. More information will be available in the future.

PUBLIC PORTION

Motioned to open to the public: Councilman Clark; Seconded: Councilman Marrone

All in Favor, None Opposed.

Teresa Hudson – 4 Stone Cir & Cindy at 6 Stone Circle: Following up on the topic of CSLR. Listed incidents that occurred within her neighborhood. Has been sending J. Thompson and Mayor Horton emails, which she claimed have not been answered. Acknowledged that the CSLR policies are state-driven, but complained that there is more that can be done by the City. Does not feel safe being in close proximity to a CSLR. Brought paperwork of statutes where she has identified opportunities for the City to curb the presence of local CSLRs. Stated that the City is not equipped to handle the kind of residents at CSLRs. Urged the City to implement internal policies. Emphasized accountability for the owners and tracking by the City.

Cindy: Shared that Stone Cir. Is a dead-end and that the presence of the CSLR has resulted in increased traffic around her house. Complained about the lack of signage, which results in people traveling around her house confused. Expressed that she feels unsafe in her house. Shared that she just moved to Absecon from Galloway and is not happy with her experience.

Council President LaRotonda: While supports people in recovery, disagrees with the local presence of CSLRs. Hopes to pass a Resolution supporting the Senate bill which makes the CSLRs more accountable.

B. Blaney: Offered to meet with T. Hudson and discuss the matter.

T. Hudson: Expressed her appreciation.

Council President LaRotonda: Assured T. Hudson that he will follow up with the DCA.

T. Hudson: Complained that he emails to the City went unanswered.

Mayor Horton: Shared that she forwarded T. Hudson's email to the City Solicitor, as it's a legal matter. Looked in the matter on her own time to see if there was a "No Outlet" Sign and discovered that one existed. Suggested the idea of putting a sign pointing to where the house numbers are.

B. Blaney: Explained to T. Hudson that he received the emails on Monday and has not had the opportunity to properly address them with Council. Offered, again, to meet with T. Hudson to discuss the matter further.

Cindy: In favor of installing a sign pointing to where 7 Stone Cir. is located.

Council President LaRotonda: Encouraged Cindy to call the Police if she has any more issues.

Chief Laughlin: Echoed that sentiment.

Councilman Light: Thanked the residents for bringing the matter to the Council's attention.

G. Seher – 65 Yarmouth Avenue: Supports the issue of installing speed humps. Emphasized the need for speed humps on Pitney Rd. Acknowledged that it is a County Rd., but encouraged Council to contact County Officials about the need. Also pointed out the need for speed humps at Mill Rd. and Route 30. Reiterated the need for Council to contact the County about the issue.

Councilman DeRose: Brought up the matter when last spoke with the County about the traffic study. Followed up with the County Engineer, who said they would take the situation into consideration.

R. Hudson – 4 Stone Circle: In regard to Public Safety, urged Council to make the right decision in regard to choosing the City's ambulance squad. Warned that poor decisions in the past led them to a difficult situation. Opined that AtlantiCare would not provide the City the best EMS service.

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

CLOSED SESSION - #78 – Contract Negotiations

B. Blaney: In accordance with the Open Records Act N.J.S.A. 10:4-6, the City Council will go into Closed Session. Closed Session is to discuss contract negotiations. Action may be taken after.

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

REGULAR MEETING AGENDA

79 Authorizing an Award of Contract for EMS/BLS Services

Motioned to move Resolution #79-2024: Councilwoman Parker; Seconded: Councilwoman Cain
Roll Call: Cain – Yes; Clark – Yes; DeRose – Yes; Light – No; Marrone – Yes; Parker – Yes;
LaRotonda – Yes

ADJOURNMENT

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

Respectfully submitted,


Carie A. Crone, City Clerk

Approved: 6-6-24