



CITY OF ABSECON
Municipal Complex
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Absecon, New Jersey 08201

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CITY COUNCIL
REGULAR MEETING
MAY 16TH, 2024 6:30 PM
MINUTES

FLAG SALUTE – Mayor

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, Police Chief J.R. Laughlin and Lt. Rich Huenke

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

PRESENTATION – Gladys Karskicki and Elliot – CEOs of Veterans 101 (Part of Veteran's Village in Absecon on the White Horse Pike)

Mayor Horton – Gladys has 35yrs of experience working with Veterans, a treatment supervisor for Veterans, transitional housing, teacher for 10yrs and in the Army (1979-1992) – an unbelievable resume.

Gladys Karskicki– Been a ride and not done yet. Hope everyone can see we're making the best foots forward on renovations. Every room has been stripped and 14 out of the 26 have been remodeled. Veterans have already started placing Veterans in. Have received a lot of support from local businesses. Open to any questions or ideas, not just our project, we want it to be a community project.

N. LaRotonda – Can you explain how you pick who gets a unit and how you get funding.

Gladys Karskicki – First, they do an application then we check their DD214 to make sure they have the required time and honorable discharge and at least one year of active duty service. We do a criminal background. We really scan and work really close with the VA. Working with the VA, HUD and Catholic Charities is the main funding sources helping the Veterans pay for their stay. NJ State Elks reached out and offered to take care of everything we needed for the inside – anything you could think of. Nam Nights have come in and helped strip rooms and bought under bed storage units. Several American Legion Auxiliary have provided items and gift cards. Mattress Factory from N. Jersey donating beds. Six different tree cutting services, 52 volunteers worked in unison.

N. LaRotonda - Remarkable what you've done with the rooms and know you have big plans to renovate the exterior of the building. And adding another community center in the middle of the footprint. Can't thank you enough.

Gladys Karskicki – Appreciate everything everyone has done, without Absecon's support we wouldn't have gotten this far. And the Veterans are grateful.

R. DeRose – As an Iraq War Veteran that has struggled with PTSD, it's organizations like yours are here every day – Thank you for what you do for every single Veteran.

PRESENTATION – Brigantine Mayor Vince Sera – Thanked Mayor and Council for the opportunity to speak tonight. Handed out an economic study that was done by Defend Brigantine Beach, information it contains is backed up by real research. When we're dealing with the Ocean Wind Industry it's probably one of the most important issues to face Atlantic County and New Jersey. Information being put out by Ocean Wind Developers; the State and Federal Government is misleading. They're relying on that no one's going to take the time to study this information, everything they have to legally disclose is in thousands of pages of documents. Has had countless meetings with wind industry representatives and they'll all tell you, they won't answer public questions. They will not say anything more beyond what's in those 4,000 pages documents, because that is all they are legally required to put out there. Long term implications to the environment, tourism, property values and electricity. Currently having an unprecedented number of Dolphins and Whales dying, they try to make the argument that there is no direct evidence that connect these deaths, but there's also no evidence proving it's not connected. No evidence in either direction because they don't have the ability to test what's happening. Murphy Administration will say there's no connection, yet in 2018 the Murphy Administration filed/joined a law suit to fight against another Ocean Energy Industry that was doing similar testing. Claimed in the lawsuit that the damage to whales, dolphins and marine life was detrimental to the State of New Jersey as well as the people of New Jersey. What tipped me off is when the two main lobbyist for the Wind Industry were asking for support said if you write a letter in support and publicly come out in favor of the project, we have a sum of money and if you have some projects or things in your town you can't take care of, we're going to make sure that money comes your way. If you have to pay to have your project liked, there's something wrong with it. The turbines being proposed are 3x the size of the ones at ACUA. The turbines will be piled driven into the ocean floor, not sure of the impact of the ocean cold pool - can potentially destroy it forever, will change the water temperature and the flow of the ocean, impacts on the fish, whales and dolphins. Going to line the ocean floor with rock, which will kill everything, destroying the scallop and clamming industry. Claim will create jobs, but no guarantee these jobs will go to American workers. Economic impact, five Shore Towns, it's estimated at a minimum a 13% loss of property value – equates to a 2.2 million loss in taxables for Atlantic County. That loss will increase taxes County wide. New Jersey Rates Council, estimating double possible triple for our electric bills. Ocean Wind Energy is an inconsistent form of energy, and has to be backed up with something else. Once this gets built, it's too late, at best, Ocean Wind Projects are set up to last 20 years, in the ocean they estimate they are only going to last 10 years. No idea of an exit plan if this doesn't work. Now is the time to take actions, Brigantine passed a Resolution and we're asking Atlantic County to act – has to be more than just the five Shore Towns. Thanked Council.

N. LaRotonda – Informed Mayor Sera that the Council will be voting on the Support Resolution later in the meeting.

REGULAR MEETING AGENDA

2024 ORDINANCES FOR INTRODUCTION

- 14 Amending Section 250-23 of the Code of the City of Absecon, granting a discounted price to Active Duty, Reserve, National Guard and Veteran Members of the United States Armed Forces for Seasonal Permits required to use the Faunce Landing Boat Ramp.

N. LaRotonda – Was furious to find out we didn't already offer this discounted price. We owe it all to our men and women currently serving. Thought we could do this internally, but looks like we need an Ordinance change to do so. Surprised it hasn't been done sooner and upset that previous administration let this go by because they we're afraid the State would say no or require the City to change our fees – I'll be ready to have that fight if that is the problem.

R. DeRose - Clarified that while on Active Duty you can be a Veteran without technical Veteran Status. Noted the importance of making changes of this kind. Commented that Absecon is home to many Active Duty Airforce and Coast Guard men and women. Emphasized that these people are essentially guests of Absecon for the duration of their assigned duty here. Believes it the City's duty to provide help and assistance in any way possible. Spoke with the Family Readiness Group (FRG) to share with them the City's intention to offer aid to Veterans.

Motioned for the first reading of Ordinance #14-2024: Councilman DeRose; Seconded: Councilman Marrone

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 June 6th, 2024.

2024 RESOLUTIONS – CONSENT AGENDA

- 85 Opposing offshore wind projects, encouraging all Municipalities to join the opposition and supporting the Atlantic County Executive and Board of Commissioners to utilize its various powers, including legal action to protect the future of Atlantic County.
- 86 Calling for the modernization of the Open Public Records Acts (OPRA) and the swift passage of S-2930/A-4045. **PULLED – NO VOTE**

N. LaRotonda - Explained that Resolution #86-24 has been pulled, as the legislation has already passed.

- 87 Authorizing a refund of an overpayment of taxes for the 2nd Quarter of 2024 on the listed properties.
- 88 Re-appointing part-time Special Law Enforcement Officers, Class II.
- 89 Accepting the 2023 Municipal Audit.

- 90 Approving a Special Item of Revenue into the 2024 Municipal Budget to allow for receipt of \$3,500 from the New Jersey Division of Highway Traffic Safety – Click It or Ticket.

- 91 In support of Road Closure and Traffic Plan for the Absecon Memorial Day Parade.

R. DeRose – Thanked Mayor Sera for his presentation and due diligence, and noted the importance of municipalities working together, but asked for Resolution #85-24 to be pulled from Consent.

PUBLIC PORTION – (Agenda items only)

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

Norma Lombardi – Egg Harbor Township Resident: Was the Chairman of Egg Harbor Township Zoning Board for 33 years. Spoke in regard to the local windmill project. EHT gave approval to Atlantic Shores (which took over from Orsted) to put a substation in EHT to store electricity. Provided handouts detailing location information. The substation is location near many condominiums and trees (which are to be removed). Claimed that the substation will emit toxic electric rays dangerous to public health. According to Atlantic Shores' own publications, electric rays will be emitted throughout Absecon. Wants the windmill project to be stopped and moved elsewhere. Stated that Atlantic Shore has been offering Atlantic County municipalities money in exchange for their support for their project. Encouraged more of the public to voice their opposition to the windmill projects. Unsure whether the public can stop work out in the ocean, but asserted that their activism could prevent the substation from being established in EHT. More communities (20) need to band together in opposition. Acknowledged that the area needs energy and growth, but personally favors nuclear energy. Wants to call attention to the issue because believes local residents are not aware.

Paul Lettieri – Councilman for the City of Brigantine: According to an expert he knows, New Jersey already has an oversupply of electricity that it will never use, and therefore, will be sending the electricity elsewhere. Listed locations which have already closed down. Claimed the project to be, at best, 13% efficient. Anticipates the company will follow suit in failure, and doubts they will dismantle their equipment upon vacating. Claimed that, according to company documentation, the cost of operation will be burdened upon rate payers. Therefore, finds fault in the notion that the project will help with residents' electricity bills. Noted that 13% of Ocean Shores is owned by China. Shared that the 2023 Chinese Balloon (shot down over the Atlantic Ocean) was sent by China to track weather patterns to determine the best location for wind collection.

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

CONSENT AGENDA VOTE

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

2024 RESOLUTIONS – OUT OF CONSENT

- 85 Opposing offshore wind projects, encouraging all Municipalities to join the opposition and supporting the Atlantic County Executive and Board of Commissioners to utilize its various powers, including legal action to protect the future of Atlantic County.

Motioned to move Resolution #85-2024: Councilman Marrone; Seconded: Councilwoman Parker

Roll Call: Cain - Abstain

S. Cain – Explained that she has received an overwhelming amount of information about the matter within the past several days. Must have more time in order to make a properly information decision.

T. Marrone – Pointed out that he approached Council about this matter a year ago.

S. Cain – Asserted that she has the right to vote the way she decides.

Roll Call (Cont.): Clark – Abstain (due to employment); DeRose – Abstain (due to personal reasons); Light – Yes; Marrone - Yes; Parker – Yes; LaRotonda – Yes

APPROVAL OF BILL LIST – \$ 693,443.92

Motioned to accept: Councilwoman Parker; Seconded: Councilman Clark

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 – 2/15/24

Regular Meeting Minutes – 3/7/2024

Closed Session as to form and content only – 3/7/24

Regular Meeting Minutes – 3/21/2024

Motioned to accept: Councilman DeRose; Seconded: Councilman Light

Roll Call: Cain – Abstain (3/21), Yes; Clark – Yes; DeRose – Yes (Regular), Abstain (Closed); Light – Yes; Marrone - Yes; Parker – Yes; LaRotonda – Yes

REPORTS

Councilwoman Parker – Community Affairs: Have not met since last Council Meeting, however two important functions are upcoming. Next Monday will be the City's Annual Memorial Day Parade featuring the children's Bike Brigade. There is a long list of participants, including the Oakcrest Marching Ambassador. Have been working with the Police Chief to ensure smooth and safe operations. Community Affairs' Senior Brunch will be on June 1st at the Methodist Church. There will be Elvis, bingo, and breakfast. Absecon Blooms, the newly opened floristry is kindly donating all the event centerpieces. Next meeting will be June 6th at 5:30PM.

Councilwoman Cain – Economic Development: Have not met since last Council Meeting. Next meeting is on June 5th at 6PM.

Councilman DeRose – Public Safety: Have not met since last Council Meeting. Recognized National Police Week. Thanked Absecon Police Dept. for their hard work.

Chief Laughlin: Announced several upcoming events: Hooked on Fishing will be on June 8th at City Hall/Heritage Park; LEAD Graduation will be during the first week of June, although an exact date has not been set; and, Absecon School's Honor's Brunch & Graduation. The PD received a \$3.5K grant for the Click It or Ticket program. They are in conversation with the Division of Highway Traffic Safety about working with the Atlantic City PD for the initiative (additional funding provided by Division of Highway Traffic Safety). Reminded public that so far this year there has been three fatal vehicle accidents on Route 30, in addition to other accidents of a critical nature. Urge the public to slow down their driving. Upgraded cameras have been installed at the bulkhead and Police Officers have been monitoring the area. Extraordinarily proud of Lt. Heunke, who earlier that day represented the Police Dept. and citizens of Absecon. About a year ago, Lt. Heunke asked Chief Laughlin if he could open up some cold cases, and so he began investigating three unsolved murders, while maintaining his work on all the other projects he does (much of which is done during his own personal time). Today, Lt. Heunke presented one of his cases to the Vidocq Society, which

is an exclusive crime-solving organization, made up of current and former law enforcement officers, forensic analysts, scientists, etc., whom all specialize in cold cases. Lt. Heunke gave an amazing 2hr presentation to the Society and Chief Laughlin could not be prouder.

Lt. Rich Heunke: Thanked Chief Laughlin. Explained that when he was promoted to Lieutenant, he moved away from detective work, however, his drive to conduct criminal investigations motivated him to look into City cold cases. The three cold case murders range from 20-50yrs ago. For one case in particular, Lt. Heunke's research and investigation revealed the discovery of other similar homicides in neighboring jurisdictions, which all appear to be committed by the same perpetrator. Explained that a colleague in Brigantine invited him to present his case to the Vidocq Society as a guest. The Society offered Lt. Heunke great advice and possible avenues to explore for the investigation. The Society is pro-bono and pays for testing that the State will not pay for, as well as provides opportunities to network with experts (e.g. criminal profilers). Commented how great of an experience it all was.

R. DeRose: Expressed his enthusiasm for Lt. Heunke's work on this case.

Chief Laughlin: Noted that this October marks the 50th anniversary of this specific crime. Shared that the Vidocq Society listens to one case about every other month, emphasizing the exceptionalism of Lt. Heunke's honor.

R. DeRose: Next Public Safety meeting will be on June 3rd at 6PM.

N. LaRotonda: Congratulated Lt. Heunke and thanked him for representing Absecon. Thanked Chief Laughlin for having the camera's installed at the bulkhead. Spoke with Councilman Marrone about Public Works-related upgrades which may be necessary at the bulkhead.

Councilman Marrone – Public Works: Thanked those from Brigantine for coming and speaking tonight. Congratulated Lt. Heunke for his impressive work, along with the rest of the Absecon PD. Committee met on May 6th and discussed several items, including: The Streetscape Project on New Jersey Ave. was awarded; Our City Engineer has met with residents about raising Shore Rd.; Discussed getting a map of City-owned lots, Green Team water-fill stations (Lloyd Jones has acquired 2 quotes and is looking for a third), and a spotlight near the camera at the bulkhead (need pricing from Atlantic City Electric). Alex Perri of the Green Team discussed fencing and a tree ordinance. Next meeting will be June 3rd at 5PM.

Councilman Clark – Finance: The meeting earlier this evening had a great turnout which included himself, Councilmembers DeRose, Cain, Light, LaRotonda, and Marrone. They reviewed many budget items and made some necessary corrections. Discussion topics included the Municipal Audit, potential revenue sources, bill payments, and bond planning. Next meeting will be June 20th at 5:30PM.

Councilman Light – Parks & Playgrounds: Congratulate Lt. Heunke and Chief Laughlin. Thanked Brigantine for their representation. Shared that this Saturday is Brigantine Vet Surf Camp at Absecon United Methodist from 8-12. Thanked Public Works for their work. On behalf of Field of Dreams, reminded residents to come and support. Next meeting is May 21st at 7PM. Currently working on finalizing the location for an Eagle Scouts solar charging station and acquiring funding for the Green Team.

Council President LaRotonda: Noted that Council Meetings are now being manually filmed again. Shared that this is a project he has been working on. Acknowledged some past issues with Zoom. Some IT work was required, but the video will be soon available on ABTV. The sessions will be available on the City's website and they are working on establishing archives of previous sessions to ensure better transparency. Appreciate the public's patience.

J. Thompson – CFO/Admin.: The City's audit report showed no findings. Documents can be access on the City's website. The City has placed its orders for Police vehicles, baseball netting, playground equipment, etc. A Streetscape Pre-Construction meeting was completed, and work is scheduled to begin on May 28th. Cautioned the public that there may be some traffic detours in the area as a result (project will take about 85 days to complete). The Concerts in the Park flyer is available on the City website.

E. Dennis – City Engineer: For the City's Crestview Ave. Sidewalk Project (Phase 2), the City was awarded an NJDOT grant for \$150k. Opined it prudent to include the grant into the bid for the Sidewalk project. Plans for the sidewalk portion are essentially complete and ready for final review with residents. Ideally wants the work complete before kids go back to school in September. The Streetscape Project will begin on May 28th. Also, on May 28th, the redeveloper will begin working on opening the Route 30 entrance to the redevelopment site (3-4-day project). Once the State gives approval, the entrance will be open to the public. Met with the County Engineer to discuss the Shore Rd. Project. Still waiting upon the County for Right-of-Way acquisition, but will help them with the process moving forward in order to expedite. Hopes to put the project out to bid in the fall.

S. Light: Asked about location for the Crestview Project.

E. Dennis: Shared that the information was included in the plans which will be reviewed by nearby residents.

City Clerk: Monthly Report – April 2024

- Municipal Court: \$12,165.70
- Tax Office: \$1,749,352.11
- Construction Office: \$15,333
- Municipal Clerk's Office: \$12,606

Mayor Kim Horton: Shared that the Senior Center will be hiring a new Director. Received call from a resident who wanted to thank Range 129, White Horse Liquors, and Rifici's for supporting OCHS's After-Prom. Congratulated Lt. Heunke for his incredible work. Shared that May 15 is National Officer's Memorial Day, and that the same week is National Police Week. Recognized the importance of honoring law enforcement. Encouraged the public to come out to the City's Annual Memorial Day ceremony.

PUBLIC PORTION

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

Harry Hartman – 632 Woodland Avenue: Asked whether Resolution #85-24 passed.

N. LaRotonda – Confirmed.

H. Hartman – Asked whether all members of Council read the entire Resolution.

Councilmembers – Confirmed.

A.Clark – Reminded H. Hartman that he abstained due to his work.

H. Hartman – Asked again whether all Councilmembers read the resolution.

R. DeRose – Reminded H. Hartman that he, too, abstained, but stated that he is, nevertheless well informed on the issue.

H. Hartman – Commented that, while the Resolution originated elsewhere, no facts exist in the document. Criticized how Council has been conducting business lately, specifically in its treatment of the lone Council Democrat in matters of voting. Claimed this Councilmember has been repeatedly attacked.

N. LaRotonda – Reminded H. Hartman that when conversation strayed, he gaveled to continue the vote.

H. Hartman – Acknowledged, but wants to see the attacks and intimidation stop completely.

N. LaRotonda – Pointed out that Council Meetings are places to deliberate. He gavelled to proceed with Roll Call, however, Council has the responsibility to deliberate important matters. Their deliberation about the budget, for example, is not only appropriate but required.

R. DeRose – Does not discriminate any Councilmember based on their political affiliation. Acknowledged the importance of every Councilmember's opinion.

H. Hartman – Asserted that the windmill issue is based in politics.

T. Marrone – Declared that his vote tonight was in no way influenced by politics. The decision has greatest impact on shore-towns. Being a local his whole life, is concerned about any impact an action may have on the fishing and clamming industry.

H. Hartman – Does not have any particular leaning pertaining to the matter. His issue is that the Resolution provides no facts. Believes the viewpoint presented has been largely one sided. The matter of windmills has a political element.

R. DeRose - Agreed with the notion that everyone should form their own opinion.

Alex Perri – 620 Yarmouth Avenue: Thanked those who came out today to speak. Shared that the Green Team is excited about the Community Garden and that the purchase order for the fence has been submitted (construction expected within next 2 weeks). Their Coin Drop raised over \$1,500 and they received almost \$3,000 in other donations. On behalf of the Green Team, expressed support for the Tree Ordinance. Thanked J. Thompson and Councilman Marrone for agreeing to meet with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service to discuss a habitat restoration project at Heritage Park. Councilman Light joined him in a meeting with Absecon Cultural Arts Alliance to discuss having a mural created on the side of the community garden shed and having the Eagle Scout project also nearby the Community Garden. Mentioned possibly installing a bike rack nearby the Garden as well.

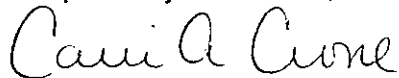
S. Light – Discussed ideas pertaining to the solar charging station and how they could positively impact the Garden.

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

ADJOURNMENT

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

Respectfully submitted,



Carie A. Crone, City Clerk

Approved: 6/20/24