

**CITY OF NEWARK
DELAWARE**

COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

SEPTEMBER 15, 2025

Those present at 6:00 p.m.:

Presiding:	Mayor Travis McDermott District 1, John Suchanec District 4, Marge Hadden District 6, Emile Brown
Staff Members:	City Manager Tom Coleman City Secretary Tara Schiano City Solicitor Paul Bilodeau Planning & Development Director Renee Bensley Planning & Development Deputy Director Jessica Ramos-Velasquez <i>(virtual)</i> Deputy City Secretary Diana Reed Assistant City Manager – Operations Jeff Martindale Chief of Community Engagement Jayme Gravell <i>(virtual)</i> Chief of Police Mark Farrall Deputy Chief of Police Kevin Feeney <i>(virtual)</i> Finance Director Jill Hollander Finance Deputy Director Daina Montgomery Public Works & Water Resources Director Tim Filasky <i>(virtual)</i> Public Works & Water Resources Deputy Director Ethan Robinson <i>(virtual)</i> IT Infrastructure Manager Donald Lynch Code Enforcement Manager George DeBenedictis PSAP Manager Brian Cannon <i>(virtual)</i> Captain Scott Rieger <i>(virtual)</i> Captain Michael Van Campen Parking Manager Marvin Howard Parking Supervisor Courtney Mulvanity Community Planer Lauren Dykes <i>(virtual)</i> Code Enforcement Administrative Professional I Danielle Smethurst <i>(virtual)</i> Code Enforcement Administrative Professional I Nichol Scheld <i>(virtual)</i>

1. Mr. McDermott called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

2. **EXECUTIVE SESSION**

A. Executive Session pursuant to 29 *Del. C.* §10004 (b) (4) for the purpose of discussion of personnel matters in which the names, competency and abilities of individual employees are discussed.

MOTION BY MR. BROWN, SECONDED BY MR. SUCHANEC: THAT COUNCIL ENTER EXECUTIVE SESSION PURSUANT TO 29 *DEL. C.* §10004 (B) (4) FOR THE PURPOSE OF DISCUSSION OF PERSONNEL MATTERS IN WHICH THE NAMES, COMPETENCY AND ABILITIES OF INDIVIDUAL EMPLOYEES ARE DISCUSSED.

MOTION PASSED. VOTE 4 TO 0.

Aye – McDermott, Suchanec, Hadden, Brown.

Nay – 0.

Absent – Ford, Bancroft, Lawhorn.

(Secretary's Note: Ms. Ford, Dr. Bancroft, and Mr. Lawhorn arrived during Executive Session.)

3. **RETURN TO PUBLIC SESSION**

Council exited Executive Session at 7:00 p.m.

MOTION BY MR. LAWHORN, SECONDED BY MR. BROWN: TO ADJUST THE CITY MANAGER'S SALARY OR COMPENSATION AS DISCUSSED IN EXECUTIVE SESSION.

MOTION PASSED. VOTE 7 TO 0.

Aye – McDermott, Suchanec, Ford, Bancroft, Hadden, Lawhorn, Brown.

Nay – 0.

Absent – 0.

4. **SILENT MEDITATION & PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

Mr. McDermott explained the protocol for the hybrid Microsoft Teams meeting platform. For each agenda item, assigned staff will present first. For land use applications, public comments will be invited after the presentation and prior to Council remarks. For all other items, Council will provide comments after the presentation, followed by comments from the public. Councilmembers wishing to provide additional comments should ask the Chair to be recognized. He noted in-person attendees wishing to comment should sign up by utilizing the sign-in sheet near the entrance to Council Chambers, while virtual attendees should use the hand-raising feature on Teams. Microphones will remain muted until the speaker is called upon. Comments are limited to three minutes with no ceding of time. He requested speakers to state their name and Council district or street address prior to commenting. He noted remote Council members will be polled for audible votes, and visual votes would not be accepted. He asked in-person attendees also present on Microsoft Teams to mute their speakers and microphones. Councilmembers at the dais should mute their microphones unless speaking. Public comments must relate to City business or an agenda item. Violations will receive a warning, while repeated violations may result in removal or a muted microphone. However, the City has zero tolerance for hate speech for vulgar language, which will lead to immediate removal or muting of the microphone. He concluded his remarks by thanking all for their cooperation.

He proceeded to ask for a moment of silence and the Pledge of Allegiance.

5. **PUBLIC PRESENTATIONS (15-MINUTE LIMIT):**

A. The Newark Partnership – Ali DeAngelis

3:30

Ali DeAngelis, interim Executive Director of The Newark Partnership (TNP), gave a presentation to Council regarding TNP's most recent updates and initiatives.

(Presentation: [Attached here](#). The presentation spanned from 3:30 to 8:25.)

There was no Council or public comment.

6. **PUBLIC COMMENT (3 MINUTES PER SPEAKER):**

8:50

Tom Parkins, District 2, expressed his disappointment with Council's decision to refrain from acting in regard to the recent reassessment. He noted Council's concerns were for increases to taxes for small businesses, but senior residential taxes have significantly increased instead. He believed there were other alternatives Council could take to make this fair for both commercial and residential properties.

Helga Huntley, District 1, noted she has a new line on her electric bill; she typically has two, one for solar panels and another for usage of City electric. However, there is now a third line that indicates her peak demand. She noted the City, at a previous meeting, indicated they have a plan to begin charging residents based on their peak demand. While she understood peak demand is part of what drives the City's costs in supplying electricity, she was unsure how to control it as a customer. She believed there are many others who have the same concern, or less understanding than her. While they understand that if they use a lot of electricity, they should turn off their lights and that will lower their electric usage, there has not been the same kind of education to inform the public of what to do about their peak demand. She noted in the minutes that the City is moving toward this because they do not want residents coming home and powering all of their electronic devices at the same time to trigger that peak load. However, she did not believe there was any education as to what drives peak demand. She recommended replacing this line with a time-of-use charge, because the City is aware when this peak of use is occurring. She believed

telling residents that their electricity would be more expensive if they used it during a certain period would be easier for the public to digest than telling them to manage their peak load.

Ms. Ford read a letter she had received from a District 2 constituent into the record:

“Dear Councilwoman Ford, regrettably, due to my occupation of a school bus driver, I was unable to attend the Council meeting Monday, September 8, 2025. I'd like to share with you my feelings on the current year City of Newark tax bills and the issues surrounding them.

The massive undertaking of the first Newcastle County-wide reassessment of all properties since 1983 has had a significant effect on the City of Newark tax bills. The net result has been a shift of the tax burden from commercial to residential properties. Unlike the Christina School District, which recognized this problem and has rectified the situation by using different tax rates, the City of Newark chose not to address the issue. Therefore, this has burdened residential property owners with the rate increases. The rate increase on my property is over 20%. One neighbor of mine has seen his City of Newark taxes go up by 60%. Both of us are senior citizens, and in the case of my neighbor, he is on a fixed income.

The reasons I have heard for no tax rate adjustments on residential versus commercial valuations were the threat of a lawsuit and the concern for the business community in Newark. My belief is that the threat of a lawsuit was basically negated by the Delaware special session legislation that allowed a different rate. As such, the Christina School District is sending out new bills now that they feel they have legal grounds for residential versus commercial rate. Can anyone in the City tell me why they fear a lawsuit? Is this threat real or imagined? My question on the mom-and-pop business issue would be, does Council care more about taxes on mom-and-pop business or grandmom and grandpop homeowners? Businesses have the ability to raise prices and increase revenue to pay taxes. Senior citizens on fixed incomes get Kohler increases of roughly 3%. If you are in your 80s, how do you afford a 30% increase in City of Newark taxes in one year?

If the goal of City of Newark's elected officials is to make it more difficult for long-term senior residents to afford to live in the city, then I think you are succeeding. Will someone please stand up for the seniors in the city? This year may be a lost cause, but I would ask City Council to please set up a task force to find out the real story of the lawsuit threatened that also harnesses community expertise. If it does not reside in the City government, then come up with a two, three, or perhaps four-tier tax system in Newark. In closing, I know the City has great essential services for its residents, but let's also talk about more austerity. I look forward to your thoughts respectfully.

Tim Kelleher
406 Stafford Avenue”

Ms. Ford noted she supported Mr. Kelleher's request for a tiered tax system and a task force dedicated to this issue.

Mr. McDermott noted there was a lawsuit filed in Delaware Chancery Court regarding the two-tiered system. He explained the reason Council chose not to act was to avoid costly litigation – if they had chosen to act, they would have been involved in the lawsuit. He believed it was in the best interest of the City's finances to observe the lawsuit to see if the County emerges successful, then reevaluate or reconsider the idea next year. He did not believe it would be beneficial for the City's financial stability to fight a lawsuit currently.

7. 1. FINANCIAL STATEMENT: (Ending June 30, 2025) – Finance Director Jill Hollander (15 minutes)

19:20

Jill Hollander, Finance Director, proceeded to give a presentation to Council summarizing the unaudited budgeted results through June 30, 2025.

(Presentation: [Attached here](#). The presentation spanned from 19:20 to 22:06.)

She explained the revenues at the end of the second quarter were (\$129,000) lower than budgeted, but operating expenditures were (\$161,000) more than budgeted. After including debt services and CIP current resource expenditures, there was an overall budget variance of -\$170,000 as of June 30th. She presented the amount of the actual results as a comparison to what staff anticipated the results would be when forecasting the balanced budget. She noted Personnel Services had a (\$164,000) variance due primarily to vacancies; this variance resulted from both salary savings and avoided healthcare costs. Utility Purchases, which make up over 40% of the City's expenses, had a -\$270,000 variance. The negative

variance is a combination of a (\$91,000) variance from New Castle County sewer costs and a -\$361,000 variance from Delaware Municipal Electric Corporation (DEMEC) electric purchases. Contractual Services had a -\$198,000 variance mainly from administrative, miscellaneous contractual, and police information technology (IT) contractual, trending higher. Materials & Supplies had a (\$92,000) lower-than-anticipated expense. She noted the timing of these purchases will vary from year to year based on the needs of the individual departments.

She noted all revenue – Utility & Non-Utility – reflected a -\$129,000 negative variance when compared to budget. This variance is broken down between a (\$213,000) variance in utility revenue and a -\$342,000 variance for non-utility sources. Both water and sewer utility sales fell short of budget assumptions, but electric sales made up the difference. The non-utility -\$342,000 variance is the result of over-budget increases in lodging taxes of (\$100,000), and Parks & Recreation fees of (\$97,000), which were offset by revenues under budget in Parking Revenue & Fines by (\$415,000) and Interest Earnings by (\$186,000.)

The Mayor opened the table to Council comment.

Ms. Ford asked what caused the shortfalls.

Ms. Hollander was unsure. She noted parking fines are continuously trending lower through September.

Ms. Ford asked if this could have been caused by the free weekend parking program that was offered by the City in the summer.

Ms. Hollander did not think that would have a significant impact on this item, as this discussed fines and not revenues.

Renee Bensley, Planning & Development Director, noted the period covered in this financial statement only included 15 days of the free parking program; this would not have a nexus with the fine decreases.

Mr. Lawhorn believed this issue was caused by the fact that less people are coming to Newark than before. He asked if the lodging taxes were on track to the original budgeted amount.

Ms. Hollander responded in the affirmative.

Mr. Suchanec noted the positive variance in Personnel Services is due to existing vacancies and asked for the headcount of vacant positions.

Mr. Coleman stated this is dependent on the time this data was collected. The vacancies within the Police Department have been consistent; while that number has gotten smaller, there are vacancies that have not been filled for multiple years. He noted there were multiple vacancies in the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) #1670 union in 2025. Due to the previous contract, the City experienced difficulty in hiring individuals with commercial driving licenses (CDLs). Therefore, many vacancies in the Public Works & Water Resources (PWWR) Department were held open until the new contract was ratified; these positions have since begun to fill. He believed there were around 8 to 10 vacancies in the City across the departments.

Mr. Suchanec believed if these vacancies have been open for a significant amount of time, Council should potentially contemplate not carrying them into the budget and consider them nonessential.

Ms. Hadden noted the increase in Contractual Services and stated this is only half of this year's budget. As they still have another half a year worth of budget actuals to look at, she asked if staff are working to trim them back since they know they are running over on these services.

Ms. Hollander explained the future is difficult to forecast when staff and Council are looking at a specific point in time due to seasonalized numbers. She noted there is a budget amendment in progress due to a timing issue on one of the Police IT contracts that will help out these numbers.

There was no public comment, and the Mayor proceeded to the next item on the agenda.

8. 2. APPROVAL OF CONSENT AGENDA (1 minute):

A. Approval of the August 18, 2025 Council Meeting Minutes

- B. Receipt of the August 5, 2025 Planning Commission Meeting Minutes
- C. **First Reading – Bill 25-22** – An Ordinance Amending Chapter 11, Code of the City of Newark, Delaware, By Amending the Provisions Regarding Failure to Pay Electric Bill – **Second Reading – October 13, 2025**

26:54

Ms. Schiano read the consent agenda into the record.

MOTION BY MS. FORD, SECONDED BY MR. LAWHORN: TO APPROVE THE CONSENT AGENDA AS PRESENTED.

MOTION PASSED. VOTE: 7 to 0.

Aye – McDermott, Suchanec, Ford, Bancroft, Hadden, Lawhorn, Brown.

Nay – 0.

Absent – 0.

9. 3. RECOMMENDATIONS ON CONTRACTS & BIDS OVER CONSENT AGENDA LIMIT:

- A. Recommendation to Award a Contract Stemming from Request for Proposal (RFP) 25-01: Administration of Off Duty Police Details for the Newark Police Department – Assistant City Manager – Operations Jeff Martindale (10 minutes)

27:46

Jeff Martindale, Assistant City Manager – Operations, explained this is a request from staff to award a contract stemming from Request for Proposal (RFP) 25-01 for the administration of off-duty police details. He noted this may be the most widely used contract the City puts out, as agencies from the Delaware State Police all the way to Delray Beach, FL piggyback off the current agreement due for expiration in October. He noted staff consider Extra Duty Solutions, the current vendor, to be positive to work with; they are also the highest-ranked vendor throughout the process for the new RFP. Staff do not recommend switching vendors at this time.

The Mayor opened the table to Council comment.

Ms. Hadden asked if this was proposed as part of the budget.

Mr. Martindale responded in the negative. The City does not pay anything directly to Extra Duty Solutions; they have an 8% administrative fee added on top of any off-duty assignments that the police have.

Ms. Hadden asked if this was shared with other locations.

Mr. Martindale noted they follow the City’s contract; the terms of the City’s contract have been expanded to include other agencies.

There was no public comment.

MOTION BY MR. LAWHORN, SECONDED BY DR. BANCROFT: THAT COUNCIL AWARD A CONTRACT STEMMING FROM RFP 25-01 TO EXTRA DUTY SOLUTIONS FOR A MINIMUM OF TWO YEARS AND 73 DAYS WITH FOUR ONE-YEAR OPTIONS FOR A TOTAL OF UP TO SIX YEARS, AND THAT COUNCIL ALLOW THE CITY MANAGER OR THEIR DESIGNEE TO ADMINISTRATIVELY APPROVE THE FOUR ONE-YEAR EXTENSIONS UPON MUTUAL AGREEMENT BETWEEN EXTRA DUTY SOLUTIONS AND STAFF.

MOTION PASSED. VOTE: 7 to 0.

Aye – McDermott, Suchanec, Ford, Bancroft, Hadden, Lawhorn, Brown.

Nay – 0.

Absent – 0.

10. 4. SPECIAL DEPARTMENTAL REPORTS:

- A. FY 2026 Finance Department Budget Presentation – Finance Director Jill Hollander (45 minutes)

31:10

Jill Hollander, Finance Director, and Daina Montgomery, Deputy Finance Director, gave a presentation to City Council regarding the proposed FY2026 Finance Department budget.

(Presentation: [Attached here](#). The presentation spanned from 31:10 to 44:18.)

Ms. Hollander noted she, Ms. Montgomery, and IT Infrastructure Manager Donald Lynch were present for Council's comments. She thanked the budget team – Trevor Miller, Jim Smith, and Mr. Lynch – and the department directors for their work during this budget season.

Ms. Montgomery began by highlighting the accomplishments of the Accounting Division. She stated this group serves as the backbone of the City's financial operations to ensure accuracy, transparency, and compliance. She noted the division earned the Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) certificate for the 2023 Annual Comprehensive Financial Report and has already submitted the 2024 report for consideration. The City also received an unmodified opinion and no material weaknesses in the 2024 audit. The division hired and trained a new bookkeeper to further strengthen their team. She stated that together, these accomplishments reinforced the City's commitment to strong internal controls and financial transparency as they approach the next fiscal year.

She continued by noting the IT Applications Division had an impressive year managing systems connected directly to their customers. She explained this team not only manages the City's line of business applications but also oversees 22,000+ water and electric meters critical to Newark's financial health. In 2025, the IT Applications Division implemented Structured Query Language (SQL) Server Reporting Services for utility bills, so customers can now see their bill immediately instead of waiting 24 hours. This team also works closely with Finance to ensure compliance with new State legislation affecting billing and collections. She noted they partnered with the Electric Department to launch the Outage Management System (OMS), where customers can now see live maps, sign up for text alerts, and track progress, reducing call volumes during those outages. Additionally, they also participated in vendor pilot groups for the next generation of customer service and billing software, ensuring that Newark's needs are considered for future releases. She noted in October, the IT Applications Division will once again host the annual Tyler User Group Conference, bringing Delaware clients together to collaborate and communicate best practices.

Ms. Montgomery explained the IT Infrastructure Division consists of seven positions and manages all of the hardware, networking, cameras, phones, and anything that powers the City's technology, in addition to handling more than 7,000 helpdesk tickets each year. She noted this year, they strengthened cybersecurity by deploying detection & response processes and new firewalls. They also completed the City's exchange migration for more reliable email, expanded the City's fiber network, upgraded workstations across the city to Windows 11, and secured more than \$338,000 in State & local cybersecurity grant program funding. They also expanded the internship program, bringing in college students each semester at no cost to the City. Finally, they deployed 28 new surveillance cameras to enhance city safety.

She noted the Payments & Utility Billing Services (PUBS) Division continues to prioritize customer service. As of current, 4,843 customers are enrolled in the renewable energy program, covering more than 43% of all electric accounts – this is up from 41% in the prior year. The team continued strong partnerships with DEMEC and Efficiency Smart while also strengthening collaboration with Catholic Charities by requiring education before releasing assistance funds. She continued by noting they supported customers through payment arrangements, grant eligibility, and new account setups, including AutoPay enrollment through the Silverblaze portal. For operations, they processed over 5,000 move-in and move-out transactions in both 2024 and 2025, and staff participated in customer service training to continue improving support for both residents and businesses.

Ms. Montgomery shared the Budget team had another busy year in supporting negotiations with the AFSCME and Fraternity of Police (FOP) unions while continuing to manage \$18.1 million in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds. They also worked closely with directors to cover departmental shortfalls created by supply chain constraints and inflationary pressures, ensuring resources were available when needed. From August through November, staff will have participated in six Council budget hearings on the 2026 recommended operating budget and the 2026 – 2030 Capital Improvement Program (CIP). She stated these meetings provide opportunities for discussion with Council, residents and businesses.

She noted the Finance Department's goals are clear and forward-looking; they will continue striving for national recognition of their Annual Comprehensive Financial Report (ACFR) by upholding the highest standards of accuracy, transparency, and clarity. Staff will continue working with the City Manager to address budget gaps while maintaining and improving services and will prepare the operating budget and 5-year CIP on time while clearly communicating a reliable financial plan to the community and City Council. They will maximize their software systems to capture accurate data, improve forecasting, provide

responsive customer service, and keep Finance and IT staff current with evolving technologies, enhanced cybersecurity protections, and streamlined processes to improve efficiency.

Ms. Montgomery stated both IT divisions collaborated in building a strategic plan to define their mission as a team and align with the City's broader goals. Their vision is to empower Newark with a secure, resilient, and innovative IT infrastructure that enhances public service delivery. Staff plan to achieve this by focusing on critical services, cybersecurity, and modernizing infrastructure guided by collaboration, accountability, integrity, customer focus, and risk management. Their strategic plan is organized into four pillars, beginning with the delivery of services. To strengthen the delivery of services, staff will anticipate customer needs, deploy scalable services, streamline operations, improve transparency, strengthen communication, and use automation where possible. She stated cybersecurity is the backbone of everything the City does through supporting utility billing, enabling public safety systems, and allowing staff to manage and share financial documents reliably with Council and the communities. She believed to remain effective, the City needs strong policies and standards, an integrated risk management program, and a citywide resiliency plan for critical applications. Staff are also optimizing cybersecurity tools obtained through federal funding and investing in modern authentication to meet the City's future needs.

She noted technology is only as strong as the people behind it and believed City's IT staff are its most valuable asset. To support them, the Finance Department is investing in training, fostering a collaborative culture, and ensuring staff have a voice in decision-making. They are also working on cross-training and succession planning to maintain continuity of service, even when resources are limited. She noted the final pillar of their IT strategy is advancing enterprise IT services; this starts with identifying department needs across the City and aligning those needs with available financial and staffing resources. The budget process and grant opportunities are key to helping the City meet these requirements. However, at the same time, they must modernize their infrastructure, expand cloud services, update hardware and software and ensure high-speed connectivity for all the City's facilities. If the City allows its systems to become outdated, it risks vulnerabilities, system failures, lost revenue, and business disruption. She noted that staying current keeps the City secure and effective.

Ms. Montgomery stated the combined Finance and IT budgets for 2026 have increased by \$494,000, or 9.7%. She noted Materials & Supplies are the primary driver of the overall increase, followed by Equipment Depreciation and Contractual Services. She shared a display of the revenue collected by the Accounting Division, which helps to fund the general fund. She noted this does not include utility revenue, which is credited directly to the service departments that provide it. For 2026, staff estimate \$17 million in revenue largely from real estate tax, transfer tax, lodging tax, franchise fees, State grants, and miscellaneous billings. The operating budget increase of \$494,000 comes primarily from personnel and IT hardware and software. Personnel Services for Finance and IT have increased by about \$106,000 due to normal step increases in both divisions. Materials & Supplies have increased by \$92,000 almost entirely from IT hardware renewals from servers, switches, and backup systems. Contractual Services increased by about \$215,000, driven mostly by IT subscription services. Accounting costs increased slightly, while IT's increased by nearly \$200,000 to cover new subscriptions and security tools. Depreciation also rose \$92,000 from equipment and software.

She noted there are no Finance capital projects planned for 2026; the only Finance-related capital request is for \$35,000 in 2027 for the equipment replacement program. However, the IT capital program is larger, with \$40,000 in current resources for 2026, \$1.31 million in 2027, and \$1.51 million over the next five years. She noted three new projects that were added. The first is Wi-Fi replacement in 2026 for \$40,000, which will optimize network capabilities at City Hall and remote facilities. In 2027, staff will begin a \$750,000 replacement of their virtual environment at both the primary and disaster recovery sites. In 2027, they will upgrade their backup and recovery systems at both sites with a \$400,000 investment. In addition to these, ongoing projects include continued investment in surveillance cameras and cybersecurity improvements.

Ms. Montgomery noted the department is also requesting one new position: IT Network Administrator I. The cost is approximately \$106,000 with salary and benefits. This role will support the City's daily network operations, including firewalls, routers, switches, cameras and Wi-Fi. It will also strengthen compliance, add redundancy for disaster recovery, and free up senior staff to focus on larger citywide projects. She thanked Council for their time and consideration.

The Mayor opened the table to Council comment.

Mr. Suchanec noted the significance of multiple of these increases; he noted a 141% increase and believed staff should further investigate it. He asked if a disaster recovery site had been identified and where it could potentially be.

Donald Lynch, IT Infrastructure Manager, noted the majority of those increases are due to equipment purchased with ARPA funding under a 3-year deal; now, those renewals are all coming due in 2026, so they are going from capital to expense. He noted the City has a disaster recovery site to be named later.

Mr. Suchanec asked for further clarification of the City's recovery strategy and its goal.

Mr. Lynch stated the goal would be to maintain services at a decreased level. As there is not matching infrastructure at both sites, staff would focus on critical services and bring up other items as needed.

Mr. Suchanec asked if Mr. Lynch could educate Council on the degradation of service levels in the event of a disaster.

Mr. Coleman stated staff are currently working on the Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) update and the development of their first Continuity Of Operations Plan (COOP). He noted Mr. Suchanec's questions are answered in the latter plan, as it addresses what services to prioritize, which services will follow, and the anticipated time frames to do so.

Mr. Suchanec asked if this had been finalized.

Mr. Coleman stated both plans are still being written. Staff will bring them to Council once complete.

Mr. Lawhorn asked what the City could potentially lose or fail to complete if this personnel request is not granted.

Mr. Lynch stated this position would eliminate a potential risk as there is only one employee who can do this work, and there is currently no comfortable backup if that employee is out. While other staff can cover the basics, they cannot cover more advanced or specialized tasks.

Mr. Lawhorn asked if those duties be cross trained with other staff, therefore increasing the roles of their positions.

Mr. Lynch explained the challenge with cross-training is that, since this is specialized work, a staff member can waste time searching for what needs to be done if they are not accustomed to accomplishing these tasks regularly. An employee could potentially spend 3 hours more than necessary trying to figure out how to complete this work, as opposed to a dedicated employee who could complete it shortly.

Mr. Lawhorn asked how often this occurs.

Mr. Lynch hoped it would not often happen.

Mr. Lawhorn noted there are many position requests for the FY2026 budget and stated it is difficult to justify granting them. He noted Council is trying to avoid as much of an increase as possible in the budget as personnel is the City's biggest cost. He noted an events fee was previously offered as a potential idea to generate revenue and asked if any background research had been done on this idea's feasibility.

Mr. Coleman stated staff researched this idea but could not recall the exact results.

Mr. Lawhorn believed this would be a good idea to implement as Council has continuously discussed potential new revenue streams, and this could be a significant one due to the large number of events that occur within the City's limits. However, he was hesitant to impose fees on events with little attendance. He believed this idea was worth investigating in the future.

Ms. Hollander noted the City's current Network Engineer is nearing retirement. She additionally noted the City relies on IT for its entire cybersecurity, so the more people in the department during an emergency, the better.

Mr. Lawhorn noted in previous situations, a temporary position has been created ahead of an impending retirement so they can be adequately trained and familiarized with the City's processes. Then,

the temporary position could sunset when the full-time employee retires, and the replacement can backfill it. He would support a process like this under the right circumstances.

Ms. Hollander noted the level of applications IT staff are supporting has not been decreasing, and they have not had any new positions for a long time.

Ms. Ford noted her background in IT and that she had asked the City Manager to provide her with a headcount for the division. She was impressed by what the IT team has accomplished despite being comprised of only 10 employees. She agreed network engineering is a very specialized skill that needs dedicated employees. She noted she was concerned about the City's contingency plans, emergency plans, and disaster recovery plans in the past. However, the strides staff have taken forward with cybersecurity have significantly relieved her concerns. She was impressed by the multiple protocols taken for the City's cybersecurity. She noted the City has made these strides with a very lean IT team and thanked them for all they have done.

Mr. Brown asked how many generations the HR or IT divisions are behind with technology.

Mr. Lynch stated the City is currently upgrading all of its employees to Windows 11. Their hardware for networking, servers, and firewalls is all current or recent, within the past 3 years of purchase.

Mr. Brown asked if it would be possible for IT's personnel request to be budgeted across different departments.

Mr. Coleman explained that IT is its own division, but the City budgets for it by distributing it across the different departments. When it is displayed, it looks like IT has no budget because they are included in all departments, which also prevents the need for the departments to have their own dedicated IT staff.

Dr. Bancroft noted the significant bump in IT costs and believed Council would be challenged in determining where this money would come from. He appreciated the improvements in services and noted his interest in the City's disaster planning. He noted greenhouse gas emissions are being supported by the reduction of paperwork. He believed Council should carefully consider how to improve their personnel situation so there is adequate backup for employees, but they could be challenged in doing so. He agreed with Mr. Lawhorn's idea of implementing a temporary position for when the current network engineer retires. He agreed with the idea of implementing an events fee.

Ms. Hadden asked if the disaster recovery plan is just a plan that staff are working on, whether they will be sourcing out the disaster recovery, or if they are planning on assigning in-house personnel to facilitate it.

Mr. McDermott asked if it would be beneficial to send a report to Council as opposed to having an open discussion on the City's disaster recovery plan.

Ms. Hadden clarified her question beyond her original statement, which was whether the plan would include coming back to Council asking for additional funding to outsource this project.

Mr. McDermott did not want to discuss the disaster recovery plan publicly except for financial concerns. He noted they may receive a memo from staff. He asked if staff would return additional funding requests for this item.

Mr. Lynch noted the IT contract services include emergency services from a third-party vendor, so this is already included in the budget.

Mr. McDermott asked how long the Applications Manager position has been vacant.

Ms. Hollander stated this has been vacant since April, but an individual will be starting in the position as of September 22nd.

Mr. McDermott asked who has been completing that job's work since April.

Mr. Lynch stated he and Ms. Montgomery have been sharing those duties, as that was Ms. Montgomery's role before her promotion to Deputy Finance Director.

Mr. McDermott asked if Mr. Lynch could explain the difference between the IT Applications Manager and the IT Infrastructure Manager.

Mr. Lynch explained the IT Applications Manager manages all of the City's business applications, such as those for billing, payments, HR, accounting, and taxes. The IT Infrastructure Manager oversees the City's hardware, such as the servers, network, firewall, cybersecurity, help desk tickets, and telephones.

Mr. McDermott asked if one management position could accomplish both of these roles. He noted the personnel request for IT seems to be a critical position and wondered if the duties for both managers could be consolidated into a single role, and the City could then take on the request position in the second position's place. He noted an employee had just been hired into this position but wondered if that would be a possibility.

Mr. Lynch stated the oversight of the City's applications is a lot of additional work to manage.

Mr. McDermott noted if the personnel request was granted, it would mitigate the need for other employees to spend an extensive amount of time substituting for the employee who usually completes the network engineering work. Additionally, there would be a person to safeguard data positions and free up time for a manager to oversee both divisions. He noted they may need to consider critical need over comfort.

Mr. Lynch assumed the City would want him or the manager to focus more on revenue items or cybersecurity items that tend to need their attention.

Mr. McDermott noted the City cannot afford all 9 positions that have been requested so far in this budget. He stated the City Manager will need to determine which positions are the most critical to include.

There was no public comment, and the Mayor returned the discussion to the table.

Mr. Brown asked if it would be possible to recruit interns to help with this issue.

Mr. Lynch explained the City is currently a part of Delaware Technical Community College's (DelTech) intern program; they get an intern each semester, but they are only given desktop support work. They collaborate with DelTech because their internships are free.

Mr. Brown asked if there were other schools the City could take interns from, such as Wilmington University.

Mr. Lynch explained UD offers a similar program, but their interns are paid. The City could investigate recruiting interns from Wilmington University, as they have not done so in the past.

11. 4-B. FY 2026 POLICE DEPARTMENT BUDGET PRESENTATION – CHIEF OF POLICE MARK FARRALL (30 MINUTES)

1:06:24

Mark Farrall, Chief of Police, proceeded to give a presentation to Council on the proposed FY2026 Police Department budget.

(Presentation: [Attached here](#). The presentation spanned from 1:06:24 to 1:34:53.)

He began his presentation by introducing the Newark Police Department (NPD) executive staff: Deputy Chief Kevin Feeney, who he believed was "invaluable" to running the department; Captain Michael Van Campen, who oversees the Administration & Investigations Bureau; and Captain Scott Rieger, who oversees the Field Operations Bureau. Additionally, he noted Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP) Manager Brian Cannon oversees the 911 Center and Police Records unit. He thanked all of these individuals for attending and showing their support for the Police Department.

Chief Farrall noted multiple accomplishments for the Police Department, beginning with the refresh of the police recruiting campaign. He noted Council should see this in the coming weeks, as it is a complete refresh of the website with new material, interviews, and videos. He believed this would help the department continue to be as successful as they have been, to continue to fill their vacancies. Additionally, at the beginning of this year, the department completed its Year 3 review for accreditation. He noted the NPD has been accredited in Newark since 1997, which he believed forms the backbone of who they are as an agency. In November, the department has a full onsite review where assessors will

come, do interviews, and ensure that the NPD is doing everything that they state they are doing. This year will mark their 4th year in review, and hopefully, in the spring, the department will get its new accreditation certification from the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA).

He added the NPD has established its Community Engagement Unit, whose sole job is to go out and interact with the community, build relationships with them, and hear their feedback regarding the department. Since this unit's establishment, they have held multiple events weekly. He noted many of this unit's activities are not seen by Council, such as going to schools every week for mentoring and speaking with the community's youth. He stated this program has been very successful in the few months of its establishment. He stated the department continues to be active on all of its social media accounts, which have accrued over 25,000 followers. Whether the messages are about emergencies or the department's positive work, they have been active and diligent in sharing them with the general public.

Chief Farrall explained the Police Department has hired six individuals this year, although one officer retired and another left for another agency. He noted there are now 5 vacancies in the Police Department, in comparison to the 14 vacancies during this time last year. He noted the process of vetting potential applicants is extensive, but the department is making good progress. Additionally, the Police Department also created a Behavioral Health Unit in partnership with ChristianaCare and has been incredibly successful in its early stages. He noted the department has completed many referrals to different mental health and substance abuse organizations throughout the State, which have helped them to provide better service to the community and ensure they are addressing issues that cannot be fixed through typical law enforcement practices. He noted the department has also implemented a 12-hour shift program, which has also been very successful and has allowed the department to put more police officers on the street during the department's busiest times. The department has also started its paid internship program, which they view as a way to develop individuals with an interest in law enforcement to hopefully join the agency in the future. He noted there is already an intern who is planning to apply for the agency as soon as she finishes school.

He noted the Police Department has also introduced a new mascot, Soar, who has been widely successful with interacting with the community's children. This helps to break down barriers and allows children to engage in conversations with the NPD's officers. The department has also continued to upgrade and deploy new public safety cameras around the City; he stated these cameras are invaluable in investigating crime in the city. In addition, the department has deployed new replacements and has upgraded the technology of its existing license plate reader cameras. The department continues to implement its Axon technology, reminding Council of the large cost for its 10-year contract with Axon. Staff are continuing to deploy the products purchased through that contract. The department also implemented a new program called SmartForce, an information-sharing platform. This essentially functions as a shift pass-on, so that all shifts are aware of what the others are doing. This also helps to share information about potential problem areas within the city. The SmartForce platform also helps to track officer activity so the department can monitor what they are doing with their time.

Chief Farrall continued by sharing the Police Department implemented a new software system, allowing them to push their policies and updates to their officers so they have it at their fingertips. He noted many of the Police Department's policies consist of technology implementations, updates or upgrades. In 2025, the department implemented the video-to-911 service in the Communications Center. In this case, if someone calls in a critical incident, staff can get them to start giving a video feed of the incident in a safe form. He reported the Police Department has also seen a significant reduction in most significant crime areas. Through August, the department has had a 25% reduction in aggravated assaults, a 39% reduction in burglaries, a 34% reduction in thefts, and a 24% reduction in motor vehicle thefts. He noted the presentation indicates an 83% increase in robberies; however, the actual number is quite small, as this only represents an increase from 6 to 11 robberies in total. However, 3 of those that were reported as robberies were only initially reported as such and have since been reclassified. He stated the department is satisfied with the city's crime rates being significantly low.

He explained one of the City's Axon products they utilize, the My90 system, where any time that an individual calls 911 to report a crime, the department sends a follow-up text asking them to complete a survey. He noted the department has seen a 22.8% response rate to these surveys. He noted this platform will be forward-facing to the public within the week. He added Lt. Greg D'Elia is finalizing a few details, and this information will be shared online and made available for the public to view. He explained when the department sends the survey out, it asks questions of both the interaction with police officers as well as the Communications Center staff. This is a full survey of what the individual's interaction with the Police Department consisted of. 89% of the community that has interacted with the department has given a Very Positive or Positive rating, and only 3% have given a Very Negative rating. He noted the department is very satisfied with these results, and these results help to quantify the claim that the

department has a good reputation within the community. He noted within the last 30 days, 92% of people have a positive view of the agency, 96% felt they were treated fairly, 96% felt they were listened to, 96% understood what they were told, and 90% had their questions answered. He voiced his pride in the department for the results of these numbers. He added this survey also asks community members to voice their top safety concerns; 23% stated that traffic offenses, impaired drivers, and traffic-related issues are their top concern. Another question asked as part of the survey is what they would like the NPD to do to improve safety, to which the top answer was to increase patrol car visibility.

Chief Farrall began to share the goals of the Police Department. He noted he and the Deputy Chief are currently creating their next 5-year strategic plan with the assistance of staff. Additionally, they will continue the implementation of the assigned vehicle program and focus on the recruitment of qualified and diverse candidates, along with improving officer retention. He noted that twenty of the City's current police officers have 25+ years of experience and could retire at any given time. He noted the department will continue to reduce Part A crimes and then continue development of their community engagement mission and programs.

He stated the 911 Center is a critical component to the emergency services provided to the community and is essential to the City's operations. He noted Mr. Cannon is responsible for the cost savings for the T1 Line, a copper line that runs from the 911 Center to the State and County's 911 center. He noted Verizon is trying to get rid of the line by increasing the cost every month. Mr. Cannon worked with the Communications Division to upgrade this line and get rid of both Verizon and this service altogether. The department will still have the redundancy but will not pay exorbitant prices every month. He noted while this shows an annual savings of \$68,000, it is significantly higher because the current price has increased to almost \$10,000 a month. The department hopes they will discontinue the Verizon line within the next few weeks and will not continue to pay this cost.

Chief Farrall noted the Communications Division hired one new dispatcher in 2025 and has one vacancy currently due to the hiring freeze. They have one dispatcher who, when hired, would be assigned to the power shift; this means they would work during times when the center is most busy, so a full team of dispatchers is available to handle emergency calls. There was one resignation, who was a hired individual who did not make it through training. He noted the calls for service are hovering around 27,000 year-to-date but are higher than the number listed in the presentation due to the 911 Center's busy operations. The division's goals are to continue adhering to compliance standards required of all dispatchers. They must answer certain questions given by the department, and the department conducts audits to ensure those questions are being answered. Another goal is to maintain the emergency priority dispatch and adhere to CALEA standards in addition to the City's compliance standards. They will also work to complete any training and certifications for new hires.

He stated the Police Department's budget is projected to increase by 12% over 2025, almost entirely due to personnel costs. He noted Materials & Supplies will be reduced by \$10,000. He noted the presentation reflects a 74% decrease in Intergovernmental Revenue or \$54,100. However, that number should actually be \$108,200, or a 50% reduction in revenue due to the update of the school district contract to have only one school resource officer (SRO), and not two. He noted the department's personnel costs have driven most of the increases in the budget to the tune of \$1,928,000. There is also a \$100,000 increase in insurance premiums, and \$1.79 million in cost-of-living contractual obligated increases for personnel. He noted Contractual Services have increased by \$355,000. He noted the citywide insurance allocations have increased along with the contractual IT costs. He noted the IT and contractual costs reflect two speed cameras, of which staff are waiting for Council's final direction on whether they would like one or two speed cameras as part of their program. There will be a reduction in this line should Council decide to only include one speed camera. He noted this line also does not reflect \$36,000 in offsetting revenue that was received just last week from the Violet Crime Fund. He noted there is a \$97,000 increase due to the fleet additions added last year to the budget as part of the take-home vehicle program. He noted a \$13,400 increase for training, recruitment, and retention. \$12,000 of the increase is in training, and \$11,000 of this amount is to host a crisis intervention training. This helps the City with their match for the Behavioral Health Unit, and the grant received for the Connect & Protect program. He stated the department plans to host this crisis intervention team training, which will help to offset those costs. He noted Interdepartmental Costs, listed at \$207,954, are shared costs that the City has across all departments for billing, accounting, electricity, and IT.

Chief Farrall explained there are capital improvement projects listed for the Police Department. Two – the Ballistic Vests and Vehicle Replacement Schedule – are ongoing and in every budget. The remainder is the Patrol Rifle Program, which is supposed to be replaced to ensure they can operate as required if needed. The department has developed a plan to replace 14 of those rifles each year for the next five years. He noted there is one request for an additional full-time employee in the Police

Department, which would be an assistant manager under Mr. Cannon at Pay Grade #53. He noted Mr. Cannon supervises 17 employees in the 911 Center and Records Division without an assistant for oversight and administrative duties. This position would help with supervision, scheduling, and coordinating workloads, materials, and daily decision making; quality assurance and monitoring performance; ensuring the divisions are following all of the Federal and State compliance requirements; and would operate as the manager during absences and vacations. He noted there is currently no employee slated as a backup for Mr. Cannon when he is out. While his staff know how to operate during critical incidents, and command staff can step in, they do not know the intricacies and details of everything that needs to be done. He added this position would also insist on ensuring staff are doing everything needed with IT due to the complex nature of all of the center's systems, and to ensure they have good communication with IT, the State radio, and the other units involved in keeping the 911 Center operational.

The Mayor opened the table to Council comment.

Mr. McDermott asked what the pay range for Pay Grade #53 is.

Ms. Hadden commended the department for phasing in the weapons purchases.

Mr. Coleman responded the pay range for Pay Grade #53 is \$69,012 to \$103,799; this does not include benefits, which would likely equate to 40% of the salary.

Mr. Brown stated Sgt. Jay Conover did an excellent job attending an event for the Newark Housing Authority (NHA). He appreciated when officers attended these events. He stated he was surprised to see increased visibility listed in the presentation, as he sees patrols frequently when he walks through Main Street and Cleveland Avenue. He noted the \$75,000 listed in the service fee for the 2025 budget and asked why this was so significant.

Chief Farrall explained this is comprised of red-light camera revenue. The City is currently discussing with the State how to get a handle on the inconsistencies in the red-light camera revenue received from the State. He explained that with the speed cameras, revenue would come to the City; they would deduct their costs to cover the program from the revenue and then send the remainder back to the State. He noted the City only sees a percentage of the fine revenue generated from the City's red-light cameras. He stated the City received a "dump" from 2024 that actually was received in 2025, which will level out the spike from 2023 – 2024.

Ms. Hollander explained the City has been going back and forth with the State, which is so far behind that they have not reconciled their 2024 traffic camera revenues. She noted this is a very conservative estimate as the City does not have much indication as to what that number will be. She noted this number is \$13,000 in 2021, but it was previously \$100,000. She noted many fees are also deducted from the City's revenue, but some municipalities were not getting revenue at all, despite generating these tickets, due to the amount absorbed by the fees. She believed this program needs an operational review from the State.

Chief Farrall noted a camera on Elkton Road was not operational during a period of time due to roadway construction.

Dr. Bancroft appreciated the Police Department's community outreach and behavioral health efforts. He appreciated the department reporting their savings back to Council, as this could help explain some of the issues the City is facing. He was pleased to see their concerns about speeding confirmed by data. He noted the significant increases in improved IT services are something Council will need to deal with in the modern age. He asked if weapons are aged by practice firing.

Chief Farrall responded in the affirmative. He noted the first weapons slated for replacement are those of the SWAT Team, who train and shoot them every month.

Dr. Bancroft observed there is "lumpiness" in the department's increases. He believed that if next year is relatively flat, the bump they are struggling with will not be as challenging to explain to residents. He appreciated the Police Department's work.

Chief Farrall explained many of the department's operations are technology-based, and their costs never decrease. When they begin using a product, they are locked in a contract for multiple years, and the contract will only have increased by the time the department must renew. This poses a challenge for the department in determining which contracts to enter into if they are not as critical as others.

Mr. Suchanec was pleased with the operations of the Community Engagement Unit, noting that in previous years, some officers were borrowed from that unit to fill in vacancies in patrol. He was pleased to see that this unit is still making significant accomplishments despite the 5 vacancies in the department. He asked if these officers attend homeowner association meetings.

Chief Farrall stated these officers attend those meetings when invited, but not many homeowner associations still have meetings. He noted he and Lt. D'Elia are attending a meeting with the Interfraternity Council at UD this coming Wednesday.

Mr. Suchanec noted two officers joined him for a Williamsburg Village meeting, and all of the questions were related to police and parking. He believed their attendance at some of these meetings was crucial.

Chief Farrall concurred.

Mr. Suchanec noted the Communications Division has one open position and has lost another position. He asked if both positions were funded.

Chief Farrall stated the person who left this position resigned during training.

Mr. Suchanec asked if this position was counted in the department's expenses.

Chief Farrall stated they were not included in the FY2026 budget. There is one vacancy for FY2026, which is the position that has not yet been filled due to the hiring freeze.

Mr. Suchanec asked if the personnel request for an assistant manager under Mr. Cannon would be covered by the open dispatcher position, along with the position for the person who resigned.

Chief Farrall responded in the negative. He explained these positions are power shifts to ensure coverage for the busier times during the night and day shift rotations. The department cannot eliminate the vacant dispatcher position to create the manager position.

Mr. Suchanec wondered how this personnel request could be justified.

Chief Farrall stated the dispatcher position correlates to public safety. However, the manager's position will improve and increase the public safety service being provided to the city.

Mr. Suchanec asked if there is a certain category of funding that goes into that position.

Chief Farrall stated this comes from personnel costs.

Mr. Lawhorn appreciated the metrics and data shown by the department, noting that problems cannot be fixed without measurements, and measurements also help to identify when they occur.

Chief Farrall stated this is real-time data, so the department will know when problems occur.

Mr. Lawhorn fully supported community policing and was pleased to see its continuation, but he understood they were previously subject to a resource issue and needed to fill more essential roles. He believed increased visibility would be appreciated by residents throughout the city, but they needed the resources to do so. He noted the department has had many unfilled vacancies for a significant amount of time, and as he did not want to eliminate units that have been lacking resources, he asked if a few of these vacancies could be eliminated through efficiencies that have been determined during the department's time of not having a full staff. Potentially, if these vacancies are eliminated, that could fund the position being requested.

Chief Farrall explained that among these vacant positions were those of the Special Operations Division, which was eliminated. This unit could do community engagement but also handle problem-oriented policing. Their day-to-day operations were uniform, high-visibility patrols to handle disorder complaints. He noted the survey results ask for more police visibility and more traffic enforcement, not less. Therefore, the plan is to put uniformed officers back out with the five vacancies. He noted these positions are vacant only because it is difficult to hire people who rise to that caliber. He noted the vacancies in the department have significantly decreased since last year, and there are very good candidates in the pipeline to fill what is left. He hoped the department would be fully staffed by next year, but he would not state that the department could reduce its staff when it could not do so.

Mr. Lawhorn noted the City's personnel are the largest portion and an increase to their budget. While he was fully supportive of public safety, he believed it needed to be communicated to the residents that it does cost a significant amount of money to provide the increased visibility and enforcement they are requesting. He believed communicating how they fund that through their tax revenue is critical, but this is an issue that correlates to more than just the Police Department.

Chief Farrall believed this is an issue that boils down to what kind of Police Department and what kind of services do Council, and the residents want. He noted the department has no increases aside from personnel costs; they have 102 employees in the Police Department, including civilian positions, which drives almost the entirety of their budget.

Mr. Lawhorn wondered how ever-evolving technology could be used to improve efficiency within the Police Department.

Chief Farrall stated that this is a current discussion among different law enforcement agencies.

Mr. Lawhorn preferred that percentages not be used to report robberies, and instead, actual numbers were used, because a small increase in a very small number could equate to a large percentage. He found the savings for the copper line to be outstanding, believing this is a prime example of improving efficiency within the City's departments. He believed these improvements should be shared with the public. He preferred to have only one speed camera and would not prefer to increase that expense due to negative resident feedback and uncertain results on the number of tickets this program will generate. He believed buying one camera first would also help to save money for the City. He noted previous discussions about the department's firing range and asked if that problem had been resolved.

Chief Farrall stated this was a large request. Cecil County hoped to partner with the NPD, but their funding was in the State of Maryland. The City's funding was required to be in the State of Delaware, so this initiative fell through. The NPD now uses three different ranges so all of their officers' needs are met. He stated he would not ask the City to fund a new firing range with the current budget constraints.

Mr. Lawhorn stated it had previously sounded as if the City had no choice but to fund a range, as their officers were not meeting the minimum standard amount of firing needed to keep their officers qualified. He did not want to lose sight of this initiative, so they would not end up in an emergency.

Ms. Ford noted the NPD had 14 vacancies during the FY2025 budget session, and Council had voted to continue their contract recruiting program. She believed they had made the right decision as the Police Department now has only 5 vacancies. She congratulated the department on this achievement. She believed the City needed two cameras: one that rotates, and one on Main Street. She believed these cameras would pay for themselves. She noted there have been multiple accidents along Capitol Trail and believed they indicate the need for speed cameras. She noted the residents of Lumbrook began a campaign asking for speed cameras in their area. She believed the City needs to pressure the State to give them back the revenues from this program and the red-light camera program.

Chief Farrall noted the speed camera program is not meant to generate revenue for the City.

Ms. Ford clarified she wished to ensure the City receives as much revenue as it need to cover the costs of the program.

Chief Farrall explained the revenue will first come to the City, and then, after they deduct their expenses, the remaining funds will be sent to the Office of Highway Safety (OHS). However, they are currently unsure what the OHS will do with the funding received. Staff hope the OHS will develop a program to enforce, educate, and engineer safety improvements for the State's roads, and that there be a process for municipalities to procure grants for related initiatives.

Ms. Ford believed the City should speak with their state representatives about this idea to potentially bring it to fruition.

Chief Farrall cautioned the City could lose money from this program in the future, as they could change driver behaviors, but will still pay money to rent this equipment and review the violations every month. Council will then need to decide whether that cost is worth the slower speeds on the roads. He was aware a municipality in Delaware has reduced high-speed T-bone crashes with red-light cameras, but they cost money as a result.

Mr. Coleman stated if the program works as Council wishes, the City will make less money because the program itself generates money to go to the State, and the City will lose money in their own enforcement because, theoretically, there will be fewer drivers speeding, and the City's officers will not write as many speeding tickets. While this improves driver behaviors, the City will lose money as a result. He noted many individuals are skeptical that this is a "revenue grab" for the City, but in truth, the program is the opposite. He stated there is no situation where the City will make more money from these cameras.

Chief Farrall noted the cameras are not designed to replace police officers.

Ms. Ford stated Council understood both of these factors when they voted for this program. She stated they will address the concern of making less money with the speed cameras once that occurs. However, due to the number of speeders on Capitol Trail, she did not believe it would be a concern for a long while. She noted she has not received a single complaint about the City's police force and believed the survey results presented concur with this fact.

Mr. McDermott voiced his appreciation for the City's Police Department. He believed the best statistic shown in the presentation is; when asked what the top safety concern is in the community, the residents respond that they do not have any. He believes this is indicative of the positive work the Police Department is doing. He did not believe traffic would be the top concern if severe gun violence or robberies were present throughout the community. He noted regarding the personnel request, the Police Department faces the same concerns from Council as the other departments asking for personnel. He noted personnel requests equate to property tax increases, and the budget will likely not pass if it includes all 10 personnel requests. He appreciated the hard work done by the Police Department.

There was no public comment, and the Mayor proceeded to the next item on the agenda.

12. 4-C. FY2026 PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT BUDGET PRESENTATION – PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT DIRECTOR RENEE BENSLEY (60 MINUTES)

2:08:50

Ms. Bensley proceeded to share a presentation to Council regarding the proposed FY2026 Planning & Development Department budget. She noted it is sometimes difficult to slow down to see what has been accomplished with continued expectations to address the next things on a never-ending list. It can also be challenging to push forward when this list never gets smaller. She believed the department has a great story to tell, and that it is important to take the time to reflect on their accomplishments to show how they are respecting the trust that City taxpayers put into them while presenting the resources needed to continue meeting the City's commitment to service excellence.

(Presentation: [Attached here](#). The presentation spanned from 2:08:50 to 2:27:14.)

She noted she is accompanied this evening by Planning & Development Deputy Director Jessica Ramos-Velasquez, Code Enforcement Manager George DeBenedictis, Parking Manager Marvin Howard, and Parking Supervisor Courtney Mulvanity. She expressed her appreciation for the day-to-day support they provide in leading their respective divisions. She thanked Planning Commission Chair Will Hurd and the rest of the various committee members who work with the department in accomplishing the tasks put before them. She recognized all of the tasks given to the department are completed by a team of 30 full-time employees, including the division managers, and 19 part-time employees. This group is comprised of 7 full-time employees in Planning, 13 full-time employees and one part-time employee in Code Enforcement, and 10 full-time and 18 part-time employees in Parking. She noted the department has had 100% staffing in their full-time positions in 2025, with their most recent full-time hire being on December 30, 2025. She stated this has made 2025 a year of continued growth and training for the department's newer staff members, who are achieving their required certifications and expanding their knowledge to improve their service to the City and its residents.

Ms. Bensley shared displays of the continued influx of development that the department has at some stage of the development process. UD continues to renovate and construct new facilities throughout the campus, with extensive activity on Star Campus. However, it should be noted that due to the University's current budget situation, projects are limited largely to those either in progress or paid for through grant or government funding. Additionally, the revocation of some federal funding is also expected to have impacts moving forward. She noted several large projects were completed this year, including the Meridian on Main at 132 – 136 East Main Street, and Building X on the University campus. She noted there are a dozen other major projects listed that are under construction, which contributed to the City's building permit line hitting its \$1.6 million budget over three months before the end of FY2025, even without the \$250,000 in permit fees that were donated in kind for the new library. This has resulted in over \$560,000 in emergency service fees collected for Aetna thus far, double what was

collected in 2024, and over \$147,000 in technology fees collected to offset the cost of the new permitting and licensing system. However, nearly 27% of the building permit funds collected came from one building permit this year. The eight building permits over \$50,000 this year make up 52% of the revenue received for 2025 year-to-date. She noted this is a vulnerability to the City's revenue moving forward. She noted that three active plans currently in the review process have been heard by the Planning Commission and are pending Council review after these departmental budget hearings have concluded. She noted another plan or two should be heard by the Planning Commission by the end of the year.

She proceeded to share the accomplishments of each division and its respective goals. The Planning Division implements the Tyler Enterprise Permitting and Licensing (EPL) system, which is nearing its first anniversary on October 1st. This is listed under Planning, but it has encompassed processes from Code Enforcement, Public Works, and the City Secretary's Office, while also requiring staff time from Electric, Parks & Recreation, Police, and Finance. 140 total processes were reviewed across all departments as part of this project in order to find efficiencies and determine ways staff can provide busy service to City customers. She gave an example of the evaluation of building permits to better determine where Planning reviews should be required, along with other departmental reviews. Under the previous system, Planning was involved in the majority of permit reviews, from a roof replacement to a five-story mixed-use building construction. This led to Planning staff spending time on reviews when there was no meaningful input to be had. By making these changes, Planning is on track to reduce the number of permits reviewed by 72% to refocus time and effort on permits and plans that need more granular Planning review to show compliance with the Zoning Code.

Ms. Bensley stated other accomplishments include launching the public outreach component of the 10-year update for the Comprehensive Development Plan with a 2026 completion goal. The public outreach program was launched at the September 2nd Planning Commission meeting with an associated kick-off discussion. The public kick-off is Sunday, September 21st, at Community Day, where staff intend to hand out information regarding how individuals can access the public process. Staff's plan for Planning, which will be placed on a future Council agenda as part of the consent agenda for Council to review, is currently comprised of over 40 public events planned where individuals can provide input into the 10-year future of the City of Newark. Staff are also looking to complete the Newark Resident Survey by year-end; they are working now to finalize the initial draft, present to department directors for feedback, and look to have that launched in Fall 2025 as well.

She noted the department's goals also include the completion and adoption of Comprehensive Development Plan VI, the successful award of grant funds from the Delaware State Housing Authority (DSHA), and utilization of those funds to complete Zoning Code reforms for affordable housing. The City has been encouraged to apply for DHSAs funding by their State legislators, and the next step in that process is on October 13th. Staff will bring an agenda item to Council to request their feedback as to whether they are interested in pursuing this grant opportunity. She noted many of the items that DSHA is encouraging communities to adopt are reflected in previous affordable housing ideas that have been brought forward to Council by Planning & Development Department staff. Finally, staff will be looking at the final adoption of the updated Newark Bicycle Plan, and the Newark Transportation Improvement District (TID) updates; the latter is scheduled to be reviewed in tandem with the Comprehensive Development Plan process per direction at its original approval.

Ms. Bensley shared the Code Enforcement Division continued the implementation of the adopted nuisance property ordinance, which has resulted in 100+ properties in warning status, 15+ properties in nuisance status, and another 15+ properties with nuisance abatement plans approved or pending for Council. Over 1,400 legacy permits have been closed, 92 processes of the aforementioned 140 were Code Enforcement processes that were reviewed, streamlined, and digitized as part of the EPL software project; and implementation and outreach with the rental program has resulted in over 200 interior and common area rental inspections so far in 2025. Goals for the division include review and revision of the 2024 International Code Council (ICC) codes for adoption by the City; pending decisions by the State as to whether they are moving forward with the statewide building code; completion of the ongoing audits of fees, rental licenses, and business licenses; customer education and training for the public-facing EPL interface; reviewing and revising ordinances based on the findings of the previously mentioned audits; and the beginning of targeted outreach based on the results of the rental and business license audits. The capacity for implementation will be affected by the personnel request included in the latter portion of the presentation.

She noted accomplishments for Parking include the launch of the Parking Advisory Committee with initial recommendations brought to Council; training and use of the Axon body cameras in the field for Parking Ambassadors; Lot 1 beautification and the addition of an entrance to Lot 3 from Main Street; the Summer Parking Pilot for free parking on summer weekends; and the creation of on-street parking

permits in under-utilized street parking areas. Goals for the division include the final recommendation for off-season parking incentives for adoption by Council to be brought before the winter season; completing the digitization of residential permitting through license plate recognition; and looking to develop public-private partnerships with local private parking entities to bring new revenue streams to the city and streamline the downtown parking experience.

Ms. Bensley reiterated the department has a great story to tell regarding its responsibility with the dollars entrusted to it by taxpayers and Council. Staff continue to work to show that the additional dollars invested in their department add value to the city, and that they cut costs where they are able without compromising service. She noted the sunset of Ucity and the transition to DART Connect Newark will cross \$1 million in total savings in 2026, with nearly \$600,000 of that being general fund dollars. Staff have implemented a shared vehicle pool for Code Enforcement to allow them to maintain the number of vehicles in the division, even though inspector headcount has increased by two; this has saved the department approximately \$80,000. The technology fee implemented has collected over \$225,000 since adoption, and staff are estimating another \$125,000 for FY2026. The capital projects for vehicle replacement, LPR replacement, and parking have either been moved up to 2025 or postponed until 2027 for a net benefit of \$162,000 in the 2026 budget.

She noted the free summer weekend parking pilot resulted in a net budgetary benefit of over \$42,000 between increased revenue and credit card merchant fee savings. Staff are also continuing their commitment to reviewing where fees are not covering the cost of services through their ongoing comprehensive fee review, which should be completed by early 2026. She explained this means that staff are presenting a flat expense budget year over year, with the projected increase in CDBG expenses making up the entire net operational expenditure budget increase that will be offset by corresponding grant funding. She stated the increases in Planning and Parking are offset by decreases in Code Enforcement. However, this budget reflects an overall decrease in general fund dollars at this time between Planning and Code Enforcement, as Parking and CDBG are contained in their own funds. The CDBG increase makes up the net increase in the department as a whole. She noted the department has tried its best to offset increases with expense decreases.

Ms. Bensley stated the department's requested personnel changes have not been incorporated into the budget numbers presented. She noted the reflected decrease in personnel is from previous staff turnover, where replacements were at a lower cost to the city than the more tenured employees who departed in 2024. Changes to cost-of-living adjustments and anticipated healthcare increases are included in this number. She noted the merchant increases in contractual services may be tempered if Council elects to move forward with the 15 minutes of free parking downtown in some capacity, as it would reduce credit card transactions overall. The training request increase is to continue training newer employees in both getting them their required certifications and continuing education credits that are required to maintain them.

She noted all of the department's personnel requests are conversions from part-time to full-time positions. Staff are requesting that their part-time Administrative Professional I in Code Enforcement be upgraded from part-time to full-time, and anticipate the salary cost to be \$57,325 in addition to benefits. This position was originally requested in the FY2024 budget as a full-time position, but a part-time position was approved instead due to cost concerns. Since the position was filled, over \$85,000 in back fees and penalties have been recovered in 18 months. Staff expect this to increase by changing this to a full-time position. Additionally, if the position is expanded to full-time, the nuisance property program will be transferred to allow for consistency in issuing warning letters and nuisance property fines. With the current look-back period of 36 months as of September 9th, there are almost 4,7000 citation records for Code Enforcement, the Police Department, and the PWWR Department that are reviewed, with more being added each review. She noted this is extremely time-consuming and falls on management in the current structure, leading to inconsistency in execution with all of their other duties. She noted this conversion will also expand the division's capacity to follow up on the rental and business license audit results. If the position is not expanded, proposed changes will be brought to Council to make the nuisance property program less burdensome on administration, and the audit results will be implemented as time and capacity allow. The cost of this request is offset by existing part-time funding of \$40,421 in the department's budget. With additional collected revenues owed to the City, staff hope there will be additional revenue increases to further offset the cost of this position.

Ms. Bensley explained the second personnel request is to convert five part-time Parking Ambassador positions to three full-time positions at a cost of \$147,006 in addition to benefits. Currently, the division is staffed 17.5 hours a day, 7 days a week. However, the additional restrictions for scheduling part-time employees create challenges in filling needed shifts. However, this lack of coverage results in decreased enforcement efforts at a time when additional life safety enforcement has been requested as

part of the Main Street Safety Improvements initiative. She noted there is also no backup for the existing full-time Parking Coordinators and Parking Ambassadors, which increases overtime costs for coverage. The current turnover rate among part-time staff means that significant time is spent by management and HR on the recruitment and hiring process. Increasing the number of part-time employees leads to additional equipment costs and increased management time obligations. If these positions are expanded to full-time, Council can expect more consistent enforcement and less overtime required for existing full-time staff. However, if they are not expanded to full-time, enforcement coverage will be reduced, which affects both parking fee and fine revenues, and the current request for overtime will be maintained. The cost of this request is offset by existing part-time funding of \$169,138 and a decrease in the division's overtime request of \$5,000 for a total of \$174,138. Staff hope that with additional collective revenues, parking fees, and fines, they will be able to help further offset the costs of these requests.

She shared a display showing the impact of revenue decreases staff has budgeted for 2026. She noted the two largest factors are a \$600,000 decrease in projected building permit revenue and a \$150,000 decrease in projected parking revenue. She reiterated the revenue for building permits is overly reliant on large project permit fees. Due to smaller plans being submitted, the timeline for existing plans to progress to construction, as well as the concerns around federal funding for the University, staff are challenged to project the same larger permit fee revenue in 2026 that has been received in recent years. However, because it is such a relatively small number of permits, it does not change the workload to the point where the workload will slow for staff. The decrease in parking revenue is due to the revenue loss from the closure of Lot 7. She noted this projection does not include any revenue losses from the implementation of a 15-minute free parking initiative, which is predicted to range between \$50,000 - \$100,000 before offsetting expenditure declines in credit card transaction fees. She noted this display does not include the Parking & Code Enforcement fee and fine revenue, as they are included in Alderman's Court. This would close the net variance between operating expenditure and revenue by approximately \$1 million.

Ms. Bensley stated there are no capital projects for Code Enforcement in 2026, and no vehicles are due to be replaced until 2029. However, Parking has several capital projects this year, including the third year of body-worn cameras. This also includes parking lot surface maintenance for emergency repairs, which is budgeted for \$50,000 in 2025. V2501 will be moving to 2025 and 2027 with Council approval of a proposed budget amendment on September 22nd. The vehicle originally slated for 2026 has been pushed to 2027. She noted this results in a net savings of \$162,000 overall in the 2026 budget. There have been two new capital projects added in 2026 for the out-years. She noted the City is approaching the 10-year lifespan of their current parking payment kiosks, so staff have added a parking payment system refresh for 2030. She noted staff have heard Council's request to have further discussion around a parking garage, so a project has been added for that purpose. She thanked Council for their time and effort into reviewing these materials.

The Mayor opened the table to Council comment.

Ms. Ford noted she had sent a list of detailed questions to Ms. Bensley. In that list, she had stated she would not approve any more requests for Code Enforcement personnel until there was an ordinance in place to close the loopholes in their present process, leading to some of their landlords incurring significant fines and not paying them. She noted Ms. Bensley had responded that the problem is that the City's appeal process is open, and there is no limit on the time required to file an appeal. Therefore, Ms. Ford had asked for an ordinance to give landlords 30 days from the issuance of their fine to file an appeal. She noted Ms. Bensley had informed her that the Planning & Development Department is working with the City Solicitor on such an ordinance to close that loophole. She noted this will also include a provision that if the applicant does not show up for court, they will lose their appeal by default. However, she noted she would not vote to add every personnel request to the budget this year and would not be inclined to approve those requested by the Planning & Development Department. She preferred that the acronyms used in the presentations be spelled out for Council in the future.

Mr. Brown asked how the free weekend parking program in the summer saved and generated money for the City.

Ms. Bensley explained the City previously offered discounted parking seven days a week during the summer period. However, with the free summer weekend parking, they kept parking rates standard during the week, then offered weekends for free. The increased rates during the week offset the lost revenue on the weekends.

Dr. Bancroft thanked Ms. Bensley for her thorough parking explanation. He believed residents and visitors alike enjoyed the free weekend parking program. He commended the department on its list of

accomplishments. He noted Council has been working toward affordable housing efforts, which fall under the Planning & Development Department; he believed the department has done a lot of positive work on this initiative. He appreciated the department's efforts to save costs, especially in relation to credit card fees. He looked forward to the update to the Comprehensive Development Plan. He asked if these personnel requests would have been associated with offsetting costs.

Ms. Bensley stated these requests are offset to what they have in the budget currently with part-time positions. She noted staff did not include a specific number for revenue increases as they wished to avoid setting up expectations that may or may not be met. However, she noted the recently added part-time Code Enforcement position has collected an additional \$85,000 in revenue; with the anticipation that all of the salaries in addition to a portion of benefits of the Parking Ambassador requests would be offset by existing budgets, she believed the department has a strong case for these conversions to help the department increase their service to the City without being at a high dollar cost to their residents.

Dr. Bancroft believed the nuisance ordinance had proven effective to incentivize compliance. He appreciated the ongoing training of UD students to be good neighbors. He believed it would be beneficial to incentivize or award individuals who save significant costs for the City.

Ms. Hadden thanked Ms. Bensley for her presentation.

Mr. Suchanec congratulated the department on a \$15,000 increase in the budget.

Ms. Bensley explained that this was made up for by their anticipated increase in CDBG funding. However, this is contingent on whether the federal government does not preclude it. The budget will come in even lower than the previous year if this occurs. She noted the personnel requests are not included in this budget number.

Mr. Suchanec asked how many employees are in the Code Enforcement Division.

Ms. Bensley noted there are 13 full-time employees and 1 part-time employee in Code Enforcement.

Mr. Suchanec stated he was largely concerned about the enforcement of codes related to renting in residential communities. He believed the residents would appreciate any funding allocated to the enforcement of the City's codes. He noted the City takes a reactive approach to complaints but believed the division's response has been stellar in addressing, verifying, and reacting to complaints. He appreciated the department utilizing Public Works for lot resurfacing.

Ms. Bensley explained that the PWWR Department helps the Planning & Development Department in evaluating their pavement condition to plan the repaving projects in their CIP. They also assist with smaller emergency repairs. The \$50,000 listed in the budget is to cover the department's material costs without taking them out of PWWR. With larger repaving projects, the Planning & Development Department piggybacks off the PWWR street contract to get a better rate. She noted the PWWR Department is an important partner in their process.

Mr. Suchanec asked if there is still a combination of lots that are owned or rented by the City.

Ms. Bensley responded in the affirmative.

Mr. Suchanec asked if the City is responsible for the cost of each of these lots.

Ms. Bensley explained the City is entirely responsible for resurfacing the lots that they own. For lots that they rent, the maintenance of the lot is often included as part of the rent contract. She noted with recent development projects that damaged City lots, the developer was required to either repair or replace the damaged portion of the lot, or to put money in escrow so the City has suitable funding when they are ready to make repairs.

Mr. Suchanec supported the addition of a parking garage and preferred to move forward on such a project sooner than this presentation indicated. He believed a feasibility study would prove that a parking garage is valid and required. He wished to see this project done sooner than 2030.

Ms. Bensley noted this project was added as a recognition that Council was discussing the potential for a garage again. Staff did not include money for a feasibility study due to other budget concerns. Additionally, Planning staff will be very busy with the Comprehensive Development Plan update

in 2026, and starting a parking garage project during that time would not likely be feasible. However, Council ultimately controls the budget, so they can move that number where they deem fit. She cautioned that a project this large would need either outside funding or a referendum to get approval, both of which would take significant time. She anticipated that if a feasibility study in 2027 comes back positive, 2028 will consist of the referendum process, and 2029 will consist of design and engineering. Construction would likely take place in 2029 – 2030 if it is pushed ahead in the queues of the City's projects.

Mr. Suchanec noted a previous attempt by the City to move forward with a parking garage, in which they received an offer from a willing contractor. He asked if the department experienced the same timelines for that proposal.

Ms. Bensley explained this was slightly different in that the City put out an RFP for a public-private partnership. They received five responses, and Council decided not to move forward after evaluating each of them. The funding structure or partnership for funding varied depending on the bid, so it ranged from a partner building a garage for free to a mixed-use building in which the partner would receive the revenue from. She noted there are two parts to this project: the determination of whether the City believes this is needed, and the determination of how the City wishes to get there, such as if they wish to have a partnership with an outside for-profit group or if they want to own and maintain the garage themselves. She noted there are other options and discussions currently being explored by the Parking Advisory Committee, and there is actually a lot of available parking. She believed the goal in parking is what needs to be investigated before they continue to explore the idea of a parking garage, as staff believed there may be a way to provide a better customer experience downtown through adjustments to parking, such as signage, consistent enforcement, consistent pricing, and working with other lot owners. She believed improving this experience could be done at a lower cost to taxpayers than constructing a parking garage. She noted a parking garage consists of construction but also land acquisition costs to get a location that will be highly used. Additionally, while Lot 1 seems to be the best shape and size for a parking garage, it is not as heavily utilized during Main Street's busiest hours as other lots. The City could also consider Lot 5, but it is on a smaller parcel and is not right on Main Street. She noted if the City wants to consider building a garage on lots that they only have partial ownership of; they may not have the access needed to get full ownership without further review. This is all information that would be uncovered in a feasibility study.

Mr. Suchanec believed an interim solution would be implementing a standard on the City's parking kiosk systems, as some residents have voiced their confusion about using another entity's parking facility after growing used to the City's meters and kiosks.

Ms. Bensley stated that the benefit of a public-private partnership is to make the equipment a consistent user experience. She acknowledged Mr. Suchanec's concerns about rentals in residential neighborhoods and clarified that the position they are requesting to be converted from part-time to full-time is significantly involved in the implementation of the results of the rental and business license audit. Staff are currently researching where they have rental licenses that are no longer being utilized and are set to sunset, but also where they have individuals they suspect are operating unlicensed rentals, where the City can follow up to state, they must become licensed with the City.

Mr. Suchanec believed a full-time position directly tied to a beneficial process is likelier to be approved than another. Noting this comment pertained to the Police Department's presentation, he was impressed that a single employee was able to save the City \$68,000 on his own initiative and believed this deserves recognition. He believed this should be established as a standard and reward these individuals in some way when this occurs.

Mr. Coleman stated this was a past program that staff are working to bring back.

Mr. Lawhorn believed the time had come to move forward with a parking garage and believed this was a need for the City. He believed Council missed a major opportunity during the last consideration of a parking garage project, as it would essentially cost the City nothing besides the use of their land, and the City would receive around 80% of the revenue generated from the garage. The developer would then get the value of whatever they wished to build on that parcel. He did not believe it would be cost-effective for the City to undertake this project on its own. He believed the public-private partnership was a better idea. He believed parking needs to be considered in the context of what is good for Main Street and what should be done to improve Main Street. He noted there are many people who choose to no longer visit the City because of parking, and this only worsened when they increased parking fines. While they have brought in a significant amount of revenue that can help mitigate tax increases, he came to view this as investing a significant amount of money into deterring people from visiting the City. He believed Council made a mistake in raising parking rates that hurt the City.

He shared his opinion that he would prefer if there were a parking garage near the Newark Shopping Center, and every other parking spot or lot would be free. He did not believe a feasibility study was necessary for a parking garage at Lot 1. While he believed the rates make much of a difference, he believed coming back to a ticket on your car is what deters people from returning to Newark. He believed if the City should charge for parking, it should be a system where customers pay when they leave, and there should be no more fines. However, he acknowledged this was not simple to implement due to the \$2 million worth of revenue they needed to replace. He believed this could be accomplished by expediting the process to add a parking garage to the city. He asked Ms. Bensley to share the total collected by the Aetna fee.

Ms. Bensley stated the City has collected a little over \$560,000 year-to-date, with a projection of \$150,000.

Mr. Lawhorn expressed his wish to support Aetna, noting he worked with their board to determine long-term funding, but wondered if this was set too high and if the City is overcharging. He believed this could potentially speak to some of the development losses the City is experiencing. He believed this should be investigated, considering the multiple sources Aetna receives funding from. He noted the City receives discounts for county taxes and wondered if they are currently getting the proper credit or discount that should be current.

Ms. Bensley explained the fee for Aetna will ebb and flow with the amount of development due to being directly tied to the City's permit revenue. She noted staff expect a couple more fairly large building permits before the end of the year, as developers are trying to get their projects across the finish line to avoid continually increasing costs with tariffs. She noted this is partially why staff anticipate a bigger drop-off in 2026 due to the rush to get moving before the end of 2025. Additionally, some of the larger projects in 2026 staff do not anticipate starting construction until 2027, but this means there will be a dip in the fee collected for Aetna, as well.

Mr. Lawhorn wished to ensure the City is getting credit for what they are doing because they are giving Aetna more money than previously. He noted Council discusses affordable housing as one of their priorities, but they are often split on ideas brought forward to them, to the point where nothing is done. He believed the City needs to reach the finish line with whatever projects they are pursuing, so they can begin utilizing their resources for other things.

Ms. Bensley noted staff will approach Council on October 13th with a pilot program for zoning code reform with affordable housing provided through Senate Joint Resolution No. 8. The State has eight specific items they are looking for municipalities to pick and choose from what they would like to use, basically consulting funding from them for implementation. However, part of the City's application package has to be a resolution from Council stating that if they give the City money for this initiative, Council will adopt what comes of it. The October 12th discussion will determine if Council is ready to dive into the deep end on this matter.

Mr. Lawhorn supported raising fees to pay for the services being given but noted the rise in costs for projects deter development. He noted that only continuing to increase fees is not helpful to the current situation the City is facing, where only certain people develop in Newark, and people outside of Newark do not want to visit. He believed this also hurt affordable housing efforts, as new developers coming in to build the housing needed is the path to increasing affordable housing within the City. He advised being cautious of how the City handles its fees. He supported staff bringing items to decrease the administrative burden of the nuisance property ordinance over adding new personnel. He noted staff have been working on the rental license audit for a significant amount of time and asked if they could instead hire a consultant to complete that work.

Ms. Bensley stated a consultant is already doing this work.

Mr. Lawhorn asked what was precluding this project's completion.

Ms. Bensley noted this project is in the research phase, and staff are on a timeline to have the final product from the consultant in early 2026. Then, staff will investigate the scale of that project and what needs to be done for implementation.

Mr. Lawhorn did not oppose reducing parking enforcement. He suggested coming up with a smart, rotating schedule for the Parking Ambassadors. He would prefer to restructure scheduling rather than add more personnel. He noted his recent experience with Code Enforcement was phenomenal and thanked staff for their quality of service.

Mr. McDermott believed a parking garage project to be a component of a larger project to redevelop Main Street, which would consist of eliminating on-street parking, pushing those cars to the parking garage, and removing all of the correlating hazards. However, this will require coordination with the State and DelDOT. He did not believe only adding a parking garage would address all of the City's parking issues. He noted the staff's personnel request will ultimately come down to the decision of the City Manager to be included in the budget, and the value of each position. However, he appreciated the work of the Planning & Development Department and their job in managing their workload.

The Mayor opened the floor to public comment.

Will Hurd, District 2 Planning Commissioner & Current Chair of the Planning Commission, concurred with the Mayor's comments regarding a parking garage. He did not believe a parking garage alone would help the City, but a parking garage paired with removing surface lots and better planning could. He noted one of the key elements of the 2018 Comprehensive Development Plan was to move employees of businesses to more entity-owned lots where they could potentially pay less or be subsidized by their employer, which helps to open up street lots and balance the load of parking. The Planning Commission had once considered how to bring the private parking back into the City's total parking inventory. He noted while parking garages are "always a great idea," a parking garage space would cost twice as much to rent as a surface lot. He believed this indicated the need to prioritize a parking garage as the primary source of parking revenue. He believed if a parking garage costs money, but all other parking options are free, time limits need to be enforced. He noted part of the reason parking rate changes were made was to be comparable to UD. He stated the Planning Commission is ready to have more discussions about parking when necessary.

There was no further public comment, and the Mayor proceeded to the next item on the agenda.

13. 5. ITEMS SUBMITTED FOR PUBLISHED AGENDA:

A. Council Members:

- 1. Recommendation for Approval of the CAC's April 21, 2025 Request Regarding Sustainable Development – Councilwoman Ford (30 minutes)**

3:08:20

Ms. Ford noted there were no representatives from the Conservation Advisory Commission (CAC) present to speak on this matter.

MOTION BY MS. FORD, SECONDED BY MR. LAWHORN: THAT COUNCIL TABLE 5A FROM THE AGENDA.

MOTION PASSED. VOTE: 7 to 0.

Aye – McDermott, Suchanec, Ford, Bancroft, Hadden, Lawhorn, Brown.

Nay – 0.

Absent – 0.

Mr. Brown noted constituents of District 6 had expressed their desire to protect a natural preserve bought by Newark and asked if a corresponding item could be placed on a future agenda.

Mr. McDermott stated this item could be placed on the first agenda of October.

14. 4-B. OTHERS: None

15. Meeting adjourned at 10:11 p.m.

Tara Schiano
Director of Legislative Services
City Secretary

/jh