

**CITY OF NEWARK
DELAWARE
COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES
SEPTEMBER 22, 2025**

Those present at 7:00 p.m.:

Presiding:	Deputy Mayor, District 2, Corinth Ford District 1, John Suchanec District 3, Jay Bancroft District 4, Marge Hadden District 6, Emile Brown
Absent:	Mayor Travis McDermott District 5, Jason Lawhorn
Staff Members:	City Manager Tom Coleman City Secretary Tara Schiano City Solicitor Paul Bilodeau Planning & Development Director Renee Bensley (<i>virtual</i>) Planning & Development Deputy Director Jessica Ramos-Velasquez (<i>virtual</i>) Chief of Community Engagement Officer Jayme Gravel (<i>virtual</i>) Assistant City Manager – Operations Jeff Martindale (<i>virtual</i>) Assistant City Manager – Personnel Devan Hardin Public Works & Water Resources Deputy Director Ethan Robinson (<i>virtual</i>) Electric Director Bhadresh Patel Distribution Engineer Lucas Biedler Finance Director Jill Hollander (<i>virtual</i>) Parking Supervisor Courtney Mulvanity (<i>virtual</i>) Administrative Professional II Alexis Van Campen

1. Ms. Ford called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

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

Ms. Ford 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. She 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. She requested speakers to state their name and Council district or street address prior to commenting. She noted remote Council members will be polled for audible votes, and visual votes would not be accepted. She 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. She concluded her remarks by thanking all for their cooperation.

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

3. 1. **PUBLIC PRESENTATION: (15-minute limit):** None

4. 2. **ITEMS NOT ON PUBLISHED AGENDA**

A. Elected Officials who represent City of Newark residents or utility customers (2 minutes): None

5. 2-B. UNIVERSITY

(1) Administration (5 minutes per speaker) (10 minutes):

2:30

Caitlin Olsen, University of Delaware (UD) Administration, shared October 3rd – 5th is Parents Weekend, with a football game on the evening of the 3rd. Tailgating begins at 4 p.m., and the game will begin at 7 p.m. UD Student Life staff have created a food crawl event on Main Street for Parents Weekend on Saturday, October 4th, to encourage parents and families to visit Main Street’s restaurants. That evening, there will be a comedian performance at the Bob Carpenter Center, which may cause an influx of traffic.

She noted the Delaware Center for Cognitive Aging Research is housed at UD and has received a \$13.1 million gift from the Delaware Community Foundation for Alzheimer’s Research. She noted it is a five-year investment, one of the largest for Alzheimer’s research in Delaware’s history. She noted this will support the expansion of a statewide prevention study from 100 to 500 participants. This will allow for the purchase of a new MRI machine to drive the discovery of new diagnostic tools and treatments. She noted UD faculty and students are working on all aspects of the research, including blood tests to identify biomarkers. The center is also looking at the impact that changes in the brain have on the cardiovascular system, and subtle language changes that can help to detect Alzheimer’s early. She believed this to be a transformational gift not only for the center, but also for the state.

Ms. Olsen stated the fall enrollment numbers are ready; she will share a list with Council of the breakdown. There is an increase of about 270 full-time undergraduates at the Newark campus, which is an increase from Fall 2024. She noted 100+ of these undergraduates are Delaware citizens. Additionally, she has contacted the Student Government Association (SGA), which will have new representative attending City Council meetings.

6. 2-B-2. STUDENT BODY REPRESENTATIVE(S) (5 minutes per speaker) (2 minutes): None

7. 2-C. CITY MANAGER (10 minutes):

5:48

Mr. Coleman thanked all who attended the Community Day event. He noted the George Read Park reopening event will take place at 10 a.m. on October 3rd. The Fall Tree Giveaway event will take place on October 4th at Hillside Park; it requires registration, and only city residents can participate. The City has partnered with Nick DeCaire from Fusion Fitness to host a live music and arts event on Main Street on October 4th. The City will host an outdoor movie night at the reservoir on October 17th. The City is looking to host another live music and arts event on Main Street during Homecoming Weekend on November 8th.

8. 2-D. COUNCIL MEMBERS (5 minutes):

7:00

Mr. Brown:

- No comment.

Ms. Hadden:

- Encouraged District 4 residents to send her their contact information to haddonfornewark@gmail.com. She noted she will begin disseminating her contact information to District 4 residents in person, as she was postponed from doing so due to a family emergency. She noted she has gone through IT training with the City since her swearing-in.
- Attended a 9/11 candlelight observance at the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) building, remarking that it was a beautiful service.
- Attended the ceremony for the unveiling of the Chair of Honor in front of the municipal building, remarking that it was a “poignant and lovely” ceremony. She thanked the City for erecting this display.

Mr. Suchanec:

- No comment.

Dr. Bancroft:

- Believed it to be a positive sign that the City is sharing notices for events and taking advantage of the weather during this time of year.
- Thanked the City and UD for a positive Community Day event.

- Stated he was looking forward to the Comprehensive Development Plan update, hoping the City would add language to allow a flexible system for incentivizing sustainable development. He noted the City is determining how to implement a stronger incentive to enable community innovation in a way that is sustainable for both the City and its businesses.

Ms. Ford:

- Thanked UD for allowing the City to use their property for Community Day, remarking this is one of the City's largest and greatest community events.
- Believed the issue of taxes has become a new priority for City Council. She reminded the recent reassessment has placed an unfair burden on seniors and those who have resided in their homes for a long time. While the State Legislature decided to take action against this discrepancy, they now face a lawsuit over the implemented two-tiered system. She noted some Councilmembers did not vote to do the same because they wanted to spare city taxpayers the expense of a lawsuit. However, she believed multiple Councilmembers favored the idea of a split tax. She wished to see if other Councilmembers would consider implementing them, upon the resolution of the current court case in favor of the two-tiered system, allowing the County's new method to stand, by potentially putting the item on a future agenda for consideration no later than March 2026. Additionally, she believed in the event the lawsuit did not rule in the State's favor, then Council would examine the alternative proposals brought forward by the City Manager at their September 8th meeting. She asked the opinions of Council on moving forward with this initiative.

Ms. Hadden asked for clarification on Ms. Ford's suggestion and if this conversation would also include the discussion of the previously proposed exemptions.

Ms. Ford clarified her suggestion was that Council bring forward the two-tiered tax system discussion if the court rules in the County's favor. However, Council may also consider the alternative in this discussion if they wish.

Ms. Hadden stated she would prefer repeating the entire discussion to include both the exemptions and the two-tiered system. She believed there were valuable factors in all proposals, and Council could potentially create a unique system incorporating factors from all of them.

Ms. Ford asked if Ms. Hadden supported implementing a March 2026 deadline for this discussion.

Ms. Hadden responded in the affirmative, believing the lawsuit will be expedited.

Mr. Suchanec believed that this idea should be revisited due to the impact of the reassessment and taxes on the City's senior population. He believed the only reason Council chose not to move forward was to avoid exposing City residents to the expense of a potential lawsuit. He believed this idea should be revisited once they learn how the court rules.

Mr. Brown and Dr. Bancroft concurred.

9. 2-E. PUBLIC COMMENT (5 minutes per speaker) (10 minutes): None

12. 3. APPROVAL OF CONSENT AGENDA: (1 minute)

- A.** Receipt of the August 2025 Alderman's Report
- B.** Receipt of the July 8, 2025 Conservation Advisory Commission Meeting Minutes
- C.** Approval of the August 25, 2025 Council Meeting Minutes
- D.** Recommendation to Amend the 2025-2029 Capital Improvement Program Budget for CIP Project V2501 – License Plate Reader Replacement and the FY2026 Operating Budget for the Parking Division Building and Equipment Rentals
- E.** ***First Reading – Bill 25-23 – An Ordinance Amending the Comprehensive Development Plan by changing the Designation of Property Located at 305 Ashley Road – *Second Reading – October 13, 2025****

15:11

Ms. Schiano read the consent agenda into the record.

MOTION BY DR. BANCROFT, SECONDED BY MR. BROWN: TO APPROVE THE CONSENT AGENDA AS PRESENTED.

MOTION PASSED. VOTE 5 TO 0.

Aye – Suchanec, Ford, Bancroft, Hadden, Brown.
Nay – 0.
Absent – McDermott, Lawhorn.

13. 4. **APPOINTMENTS TO BOARDS, COMMITTEES AND COMMISSIONS:** None

14. 5. **ITEMS NOT FINISHED AT PREVIOUS MEETING:** None

15. 6. **SPECIAL DEPARTMENT REPORTS:**

A. Recommendation to Amend the 2025 Approved Operating Budget to reallocate State PILOT funding from FY2024 – Chief of Police Mark Farrall (15 minutes)

16:52

Mr. Coleman explained the City entered into and budgeted for this contract with Axon in 2024, but the effective date of the contract was January 15, 2025. City staff are now requesting Council to move the funding that was budgeted for FY2024 to FY2025 in accordance with the City’s accounting practices. He noted there is no new funding required as part of this request.

There was no Council or public comment.

MOTION BY DR. BANCROFT, SECONDED BY MR. BROWN: THAT COUNCIL AMEND THE FY2025 APPROVED OPERATING BUDGET BY ALLOCATING \$500,000 FROM THE STATE PILOT FUNDING FROM THE FY2024 POLICE DEPARTMENT CONTRACTUAL SERVICES BUDGET TO THE FY2025 BUDGET TO ALIGN THE EXPENSE WITH THE APPROPRIATE FISCAL YEAR.

MOTION PASSED. VOTE 5 TO 0.

Aye – Suchanec, Ford, Bancroft, Hadden, Brown.
Nay – 0.
Absent – McDermott, Lawhorn.

18. 6-B. **RECOMMENDATION TO WAIVE THE BID PROCESS IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE CODE OF THE CITY OF NEWARK FOR INTERNET ACCESS AND SERVICES FROM CROWN CASTLE FIBER, LLC – IT INFRASTRUCTURE MANAGER DONALD LYNCH (10 MINUTES)**

18:58

Donald Lynch, IT Infrastructure Manager, explained staff are recommending Council waive the bid process to extend the City’s current contract with Crown Castle Fiber, LLC, for Internet access and services for an additional 5 years. He noted Crown Castle has been the City’s primary internet service provider since 2025, delivering reliable, high-speed internet and security services to the municipal building. Over the past decade, staff have been satisfied with the service’s and dependability. As part of this renewal, the City has also proposed an expansion in service to include a dedicated internet connection at the City’s Field Operations Complex to support operations at that site. He noted the total cost of the 5-year contract is \$180,000, billed annually at \$30,000 per year. \$30,000 in funding has been included in the FY2026 proposed operating budget.

The Deputy Mayor opened the table to Council comment.

Dr. Bancroft stated there is much expertise and support on Council for the IT budget. He believed it made sense to be cautious about sharing extensive information regarding some of the City’s IT processes but also believed it was critical to be confident in the City’s Internet system. He appreciated the efforts of the IT staff.

There was no public comment.

MOTION BY MR. BROWN, SECONDED BY MR. SUCHANEC: THAT COUNCIL WAIVE THE BID PROCESS IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE CODE OF THE CITY OF NEWARK FOR INTERNET ACCESS AND SERVICES FROM CROWN CASTLE FIBER, LLC, IN THE AMOUNT OF \$180,000 FOR A PERIOD OF FIVE YEARS TO EXPIRE JANUARY 1, 2031.

MOTION PASSED. VOTE 5 TO 0.

Aye – Suchanec, Ford, Bancroft, Hadden, Brown.
Nay – 0.
Absent – McDermott, Lawhorn.

Ms. Ford noted Dr. Freeman Williams had missed the opportunity to provide public comment, but offered him a period to speak.

Dr. Freeman Williams, Chair of the Newark branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), stated the NAACP is sponsoring a public forum at 6 p.m. on Wednesday, September 24th, at the George Wilson Center (GWC) to provide an opportunity for local elected officials to share their thoughts with the NAACP's members. He noted this is the first event of this nature for the Newark NAACP branch, but they are hoping to continue it in the future. He noted this event aims to open a dialogue and ensure people have an understanding of the various components and responsibilities of the government. Additionally, the NAACP is hoping to play a "clearinghouse" role to ensure those conversations and the information received are disseminated, especially in light of the recent controversy surrounding the reassessment. The Newark NAACP branch wanted to also reach out to Council to ensure they have a chance to participate in this event. Additionally, the Newark NAACP branch is sponsoring a blood drive event at UD's Warner Hall on Saturday, September 27th, from 9 a.m. to 2 pm. He believed this would be a great opportunity for individuals to donate blood to those who may suffer from different blood conditions. He noted walk-in appointments are available to anyone who wishes to donate. He thanked Ms. Ford for pausing the agenda to allow him to speak.

18. 6-C. RECOMMENDATION TO AMEND THE 2025 OPERATING BUDGET BY ACCEPTING GRANT AWARD FROM THE MUNICIPAL INVESTMENT FUND – ELECTRIC DIRECTOR BHADRESH PATEL (15 MINUTES)

25:11

Bhadresh Patel, Electric Director, stated on March 5th the Electric Department applied for Phase One of the Municipal Investment Grant (MIG) funding. Staff were notified on August 6th that the City has been selected to receive the \$250,000 grant. This funding will be used to support market-building activities, develop a public-private partnership plan, and complete technical analyses on the electric system. He recommended that Council amend the 2025 operating budget and accept the grant funding award.

Lucas Biedler, Distribution Engineer, noted this is a federal grant with the purpose of working on local clean energy projects. He noted Phase One consists of market-building activities for these private partnerships in the future. He explained once the grant agreement is signed, the money will need to be spent within 6-months. Staff intend to spend the money on activities to develop a market in Newark to move forward with these projects in the future.

The Deputy Mayor opened the table to Council comment.

Mr. Suchanec asked if there was a risk in accepting this grant funding, noting the federal government's recent trends.

Mr. Biedler explained when the City first applied for this funding in February, the federal government was supposed to reply in March, but it had been challenged in court for several months. Eventually, they won, but they made sure not to release any awards until they were sure they were successful. The government has been continuously reassuring the City that the funds are confirmed, but they are also being rigorous about ensuring the City follows all protocols.

Ms. Hadden asked how many organizations applied for this funding.

Mr. Biedler believed around 150 organizations applied.

Ms. Hadden asked for clarification that this gives the City an opportunity to compete for up to \$2 million, and how this would transpire.

Mr. Biedler explained Phase Two would consist of up to \$2 million toward a specific project. Phase One is currently determining how those local projects can be done, what the market looks like, and how they can move forward. Phase Two correlates to a specific project, which will be much more expensive. The City intends to apply for the Phase Two grant, as well.

Mr. Brown asked what methods of marketing the Electric Department plans to use.

Mr. Biedler explained the market-building term is vague, but the main idea the department is proposing to use this money for is a technical study of the City's system. A large portion will be allocated towards a feasibility study to determine if the City utility is ready for solar and batteries, and what that

looks like both technically and economically. This is not marketing itself, but instead building the market to determine how ready the City is for these projects, and how to best respond and ensure these initiatives go well. Marketing would consist of holding community events, social media events, and outreach programs to educate the public on these initiatives, gauge their interest in these projects, and form a dialogue with the community.

Mr. Brown asked if there is a time period to use this funding.

Mr. Biedler reiterated the City has 6 months to use this funding before applying for the \$2 million.

Mr. Brown asked if there would be a 6-month time limit to use the \$2 million, should the City be approved for the Phase Two grant.

Mr. Biedler was unsure; he believed the time limit to use the \$2 million would be longer than 6 months, but would need to confirm.

Dr. Bancroft noted he frequently researches statistics for programs of this nature and interacts frequently with Energize Delaware. He believed this was a good program to discuss with the community, and research what the technological feasibility is for this study, and if the City is ready for the smart grid. He did not believe the City would see constraint in these results. He appreciated staff's efforts and looked forward to seeing the results.

Ms. Ford did not see a reason for Council to reject any grant funding. She noted the City lost the \$500,000 grant they had received for 11 EV chargers due to the changes at the federal level. She noted she had asked at that time if it would be possible for the City to charge a slightly higher rate for electricity for public EV chargers, while keeping rates below what commercial fueling stations charge, and if that could be a potential new revenue stream for the City. She noted the City's rates are significantly lower than those of its competitors, such as Wawa.

Mr. Patel noted the main difference between the City's EV chargers and Wawa's is that Wawa's rates are higher due to offering faster Level 3 chargers. The City provides Level 2 chargers. Currently, the EV Chargers are set to use the City's normal residential rates. Once the City has completed its rate study and Council adopts a new rate, then the City can go ahead and make those changes to its charging stations.

Ms. Ford asked if the City would be able to charge at a slightly higher rate for EV chargers than the residential rate.

Mr. Patel stated it would be the decision of staff, the City Manager, and Council to decide what rate they wish to charge.

There was no public comment.

MOTION BY MR. BROWN, SECONDED BY MS. HADDEN: THAT COUNCIL ACCEPT THE FEDERAL GRANT AWARD FROM THE MUNICIPAL INVESTMENT FUND IN THE AMOUNT OF \$250,000 AND AMEND THE 2025 OPERATING BUDGET AS OUTLINED IN THE STAFF MEMO DATED SEPTEMBER 15, 2025.

MOTION PASSED. VOTE 5 TO 0.

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

Nay – 0.

Absent – McDermott, Lawhorn.

18. 6-D. 2025-2027 COLLECTIVE BARGAINING AGREEMENT; FOP LODGE #4 – ASSISTANT CITY MANAGER – PERSONNEL DEVAN HARDIN (10 MINUTES)

34:38

Devan Hardin, Assistant City Manager – Personnel, explained a successor agreement has been agreed upon among the City of Newark and Fraternal Order of Police (FOP) Lodge #4. She noted the current collective bargaining agreement for FOP Lodge #4 expired on June 30, 2025. Staff negotiated with the union on a tentative agreement in good faith, which has been presented to Mayor and Council for consideration and feedback. She stated staff recommend approving the proposed tentative agreement, which has since been finalized and ratified by the FOP. Once Council ratifies the tentative agreement, the new collective bargaining agreement shall become a public document and be posted on the City of Newark website as per the usual protocol with past agreements.

The Deputy Mayor opened the table to Council comment.

Mr. Suchanec expressed his appreciation for both sides negotiating in good faith.

Dr. Bancroft thanked staff and the FOP for their diligent work.

There was no public comment.

MOTION BY MR. BROWN, SECONDED BY MS. HADDEN: THAT COUNCIL APPROVE THE CITY MANAGER TO ENTER INTO A COLLECTIVE BARGAINING AGREEMENT WITH FOP LODGE #4 FOR THE YEAR 2025 – 2027 AS OUTLINED AND PROVIDED TO COUNCIL.

MOTION PASSED. VOTE 5 TO 0.

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

Nay – 0.

Absent – McDermott, Lawhorn.

- 16. 7. **FINANCIAL STATEMENT:** None
- 17. 8. **RECOMMENDATIONS ON CONTRACTS & BIDS OVER CONSENT AGENDA LIMIT:** None
- 19. 9. **ORDINANCES FOR SECOND READING & PUBLIC HEARING:** None
- 23. 10. **RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE PLANNING COMMISSION AND/OR PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT:** None
- 24. Meeting adjourned at 7:37 p.m.

Tara Schiano
Director of Legislative Services
City Secretary

/jh