

**LINWOOD COMMON COUNCIL**  
**CAUCUS MINUTES**  
**May 22, 2024**

Council President Eric Ford called the meeting to order at 6:00 P.M., noting that the meeting had been advertised in compliance with the requirements of the Open Public Meetings Act.

1. Roll Call

Present: Mayor Darren Matik; Councilwoman Blair Albright; Councilwoman Stacy DeDomenicis; Councilman Ken Kelly; Councilman Matt Levinson; Councilman Todd Michael; Councilman Adam Walcoff; and Council President Eric Ford.

Absent: None.

Also Present: Joseph L. Youngblood, Jr., City Solicitor; Jen Heller, Engineer's Office; Anthony Strazzeri, CFO; Chief Steve Cunningham, Police Department; Colleen Kaufelds, Park Director; and Leigh Ann Napoli, Municipal Clerk.

2. Approval of Minutes Without Formal Reading

Councilman Walcoff, motioned, seconded by Councilwoman Albright, to approve the minutes of the May 8, 2024 Caucus meeting without formal reading. All members of Council were in favor. Motion was approved.

3. Councilwoman Albright

A. Planning, Engineering, and Development

1. Councilwoman Albright discussed a Resolution authorizing a Change Order with South State with regard to the Resurfacing of Franklin Boulevard Phase 2. This project was completed with grant money and came in under budget.
2. Councilwoman Albright advised of a Resolution on the agenda authorizing a Change Order with R. Maxwell Construction with regard to the All Wars Memorial Park Field House. Unanticipated electric and sewer work were needed.
3. Councilwoman Albright advised of a Resolution on the agenda authorizing an application to the NJ Clean Energy Community Energy Planning Grant Program. This is for sustainable energy possibilities.

4. Councilman Levinson

A. Revenue & Finance

1. Councilman Levinson advised of a Resolution on the agenda authorizing the refund of taxes for a disabled veteran status at 907 Bartlett Avenue and 10 Somers Avenue.

5. Councilman Michael

A. Public Safety

1. Councilman Michael advised of a Resolution appointing Firefighter Frank Gabriel to the position of Acting Captain of the Linwood Fire Department.

6. Council President Ford

A. Administration

1. Council President Ford reviewed the Linwood Recreation Master Plan. The plan was prepared after almost eighteen months of discussion and reviewing the prior plans in 2015 under the Blue Ribbon Committee on Recreation and 2019 plan that considered a skate park and was ultimately pulled due to financial concerns. Councilwoman Albright, Councilman Walcoff and himself reviewed the needs of the sports teams for All Wars Memorial Park and the Poplar Avenue Field. and the City Engineer's Office studied both locations for grading and drainage needs. A plan for was shown for All Wars Memorial Park that would include basketball, pickleball, and a multi-purpose synthetic turf field. After a review of the costs associated, there is no real difference in synthetic turf and natural grass. This would allow the existing fields to rest. The plan would also create an additional baseball field. Councilwoman Albright

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advised that having a synthetic turf field would reduce the current annual costs of field maintenance. Council President Ford reviewed the plan for Poplar Avenue Field which includes added parking, field improvements, passive recreation equipment, a rebounding lacrosse/soccer wall, and a skatepark. The plans presented tonight are only proposed. Whether they come to fruition depends on all of Council. Councilwoman DeDomenicis advised that she was on the committee in 2019 that researched the feasibility for a skatepark. Her concerns are the same as they were in the past which include; if the City is in compliance with the JIF requirements; if it has to be staffed; if the police will monitor it; if parking will be an issue; what noise might be generated; and if it will be locked. She likes the plans overall. Councilman Walcoff advised that he was a member of the committee for the recreation master plan. The plan is to modernize recreation in Linwood. The synthetic turf field will help alleviate a lot of the field problems. The plans also include opportunities for people who are not part of a team. These improvements will bring up the property values in Linwood. He, too, participated in discussions on a skate park in 2019 and understands that it failed for financial reasons. The proposed plans for the Poplar Avenue complex include increased parking. No lighting is being proposed. He does not want a skate park to be supervised as it would add to the liability of the City should it be supervised. He is proud of the plans for both parks that have been submitted. Mr. Kelly commended the efforts of the committee for preparing a master plan that encompasses a variety of opportunities. A synthetic turf field would be great for a multi-field use. Drainage improvements are highly needed there. He plans on making a list of pros and cons for the plans and wants to hear from the public. He would like to see what the JIF requirements are for a skate park and get feedback from the Police. The plans include so many individual uses, not just opportunities for teams. This is only in the planning phase, not the decision phase. They will look at all the costs for the projects as a whole. Councilman Levinson believes the plan is very well done. He asked the committee if they spoke to the sports team for field needs? Councilman Levinson did see an analysis of costs for turf verse natural grass. He would like to see the area proposed for basketball in a better sight line. He also asked about the need for turning the field and how it would look with the netting, goal posts, and fencing. Council President Ford discussed the need to turn the field and how the goal posts, netting and fencing will work. Councilman Levinson indicated that he was on the Blue Ribbon Committee for Recreation in 2015 and the main focus at the time was Poplar Avenue. He is surprised about the proposed skate park there. He believes parking is needed as well as additional trees. He suggested that the proposed exercise equipment might be used more if it were closer to the bike path. The Mayor served on the Recreation Board in 2008. Field issues were a problem then and still are. This is the first time he has seen a Master Plan for Recreation that will address the issues of resting the fields and drainage improvements. The committee took everyone's wants and needs into consideration when developing this plan. He was asked if taxes will increase if these improvements are done. The Mayor indicated that the only reason taxes are increased are for reasons outside of Linwood's control, such as state health benefits increases or loss of revenue. The Council members are financially feasible. The City's debt ratio is low and these projects need to be done. They will increase the desirability to live in Linwood and the property values will go up. He believes it is a great plan. Councilman Michael indicated that Council is constantly doing projects that are necessary, but not exciting, such as paving, drainage and sewer improvements. However, this is a fantastic master plan that will solve many problems in the City. There is no more space in the City to build more fields. The lights and drainage at Memorial Field have to be done. Having a synthetic turf field will solve a field use problem and provide a field that can always be used. Bringing basketball back makes sense as long as the sight lines are sufficient for the Police. He also believes pickleball will be a good addition. Council needs to make Poplar Avenue field more useful and provide activities non-related to team sports. He questions if there is a demand for a skatepark in Linwood. Team sports are

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more quantifiable. This will all cost a lot of money but it can be done once and done right. Councilwoman Albright appreciates everyone's input, questions and concerns. Her committee will re-group and provide answers to everyone's questions. She has lived in Linwood her whole life. The City has grown. There is not a lot of vacant land left. There are a lot of different wants and needs in the City and the committee is trying to incorporate something for everyone.

At 6:56 P.M., Council President Ford called a recess.

Respectfully submitted,

Leigh Ann Napoli, RMC  
Municipal Clerk