

THE WORK SESSION OF THE CITY OF BURLINGTON COMMON COUNCIL, COUNTY OF BURLINGTON, STATE OF NEW JERSEY, WAS HELD ON TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 10, 2026, AT 7:00 PM, IN THE CITY HALL, 525 HIGH STREET, BURLINGTON, NJ, PURSUANT TO THE OPEN PUBLIC MEETINGS ACT.

This meeting was called pursuant to the provisions of the Open Public Meetings Law. This meeting of February 10, 2026, was included in a list of meetings notice sent to the Burlington County Times and the Trenton Times and advertised in said newspapers and posted on the bulletin board in the Municipal Building on January 7, 2026, and has remained continuously posted as the required notices under the Statute. In addition, a copy of this notice is and has been available to the public and is on file in the office of the Municipal Clerk.

Cindy A. Crivaro, RMC
Municipal Clerk

The Municipal Clerk advised the public of the location of the two fire exits: one on the left after exiting the Council Chamber and the other being the entrance to the building.

Governing Body Members present: Dave Ballard, Dawn Bergner-Thompson, George Chachis, Timothy Hutton, Richard Spaulding, Mary Wirth, Suzanne Woodard.

Also present: Administrator Johanna Conyer, Municipal Attorney Justin Strausser, Police Chief Ryan Elbertson.

SALUTE TO FLAG

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Lenore Lado, 26 W. Union Street – Spoke as a frequent visitor of the Keegan Center, reported that the defibrillator is missing from its box and expressed concern that even though the head of the senior group was aware and had reported it, the defibrillator has yet to be replaced; Criticized the poor snow removal efforts town-wide, specifically spoke to sidewalks that are the responsibility of landlords and homeowners, especially on E. Union Street when pedestrians are forced to zigzag across streets to safely reach their destination; Spoke of traffic safety, described a near-collision at the Union and High Street intersection; Asked if the camera is operational, whether it captured the license plate, and how to file a complaint against the opposing driver. (Response: Contact the Police Department to report safety issues, per the Council President).

Pamela Dennis, 423 York Street – Attended primarily for the Allen School discussion and inquired about when public comments would be allowed. (Response: The process was explained by the Business Administrator).

Maricee Roderick, 209 E. Broad Street – Inquired about Summer Camp 2026, noting the cost, last year's late rollout, and the lead time for families to prepare; Asked for additional information to help families prepare summer plans for their youth. (Response: Registration opens in April, per Administrator Conyer).

PUBLIC HEARING

William R. Allen School Park Improvement Project:

Presented by City Engineer William H. Kirchner, PE, CME, N-2 & Timothy Kaluhiokalani, LLA, PP

The City of Burlington is seeking funding through the State of New Jersey Green Acres Program for improvements at William R. Allen School Park located at 400 Mitchell Avenue in Burlington City, New Jersey 08016.

This is a project building on work that the city has done to restore the Allen School. The intent of the Allen School will be to function as a Community Center, hopefully later this year. The city thought it would make sense to include outdoor activities along with the Community Center. Green Acres funding is a means by which these improvements can be made and the cost shared not only by the residents of the City of Burlington but grant money from the State of New Jersey. It makes it more cost effective for the city. This is the same program that we have used in the last 2 years to secure grant funding for the JFK Jake's Law Playground and the rehab going on at the Walnut Street and 6th Street Park. Both of those have received 75% funding and are out to bid currently. It took some time because of the permits required by the State; the JFK Jake's Law Playground is in a floodplain. We anticipate recommending the contract award in early March. This would be the 3rd grant obtained by the city through Green Acres. This year the formula gets us 50% funding. When we get into the Allen School Park, we will go over the costs so you can see the share being picked up by Green Acres. Green Acres has been around since 1961 and have protected more than 725,000 acres of open space and parkland throughout the state. They have funded 1,256 local and non-profit park projects. Their mission is to help grow and protect state lands and park space.

We're excited to share a plan that will significantly enhance the park and create a more welcoming space for families and residents of all ages. First, we're proposing to fully resurface and rehabilitate the existing basketball court. The current court has cracking and deterioration, so this project will restore it and bring it up to high school regulation dimensions. This will provide a safer, higher-quality space for active recreation. The court will also include improved sidewalk access and new concrete-pad mounted bleachers for spectators. Next, we're planning to install two brand-new playgrounds—one designed for children ages 2 to 5, and another for children ages 5 to 12. Currently, there are no playground structures at the park, so this will be a major addition. Each play area will have poured-in-place rubber safety surfacing, along with a bench for seating. The play area consists of swings, slides, climber, seesaw, and disc net climber. Between the two playgrounds, there will be a landscaped mulched bed planted with native vegetation. This area will function as a rain garden, helping to manage stormwater runoff from the playgrounds and nearby sidewalks, while also adding natural beauty to the park. On the eastern side of the site, we're proposing a new multi-use grass field. To support healthy turf growth and long-term maintenance, soil amendments will be added, and a spray-head irrigation system will be installed. We also plan to construct a pavilion between the playgrounds and the multi-use field. This covered space will provide shade and shelter, creating a comfortable place for small gatherings or for parents and visitors who want to relax and observe park activities. All of these improvements will be connected by an ADA-compliant concrete walkway that runs throughout the facility, ensuring accessibility

for everyone. Finally, at the main park entrance, we're proposing to install formal ornamental picket fencing to create a welcoming and attractive gateway into the park.

The overview of the Environmental Impact Statement for the project site is generally flat and open with mostly poor- quality grass and dirt patches. There would be no impact on the Assiscunk Creek that borders the east of the park. There are existing fencing and trees that will not be disturbed and there are no impacts adjacent features. It is anticipated that the soil disturbance will require a Burlington County Soil Conservation District Permit and an NJDEP Construction Activity Permit and location relative to Assiscunk Creek will require additional NJDEP permitting. The Allen School building, which was entered into the NJ Register of Historic Places in 1990 and the US National Register of Historic Places in 1991.

Again, there are currently two Green Acres funded projects that are out to bid and anticipate construction for this year. Sixth Street Park (Walnut Avenue & Sixth Street). This park is fully engineered with construction drawings that include development of a playground area, pickleball and basketball courts, a picnic area and pedestrian walkways. Commencement of construction is anticipated in the summer of 2026. John F. Kennedy Park. This park is fully engineered with construction drawings that include development of a playground area, a pedestrian and walkway that provide access around much of its lake frontage and to adjacent residential neighborhoods. Commencement of construction is anticipated in the summer of 2026.

The City is also evaluating the other neighborhood parks with playground equipment determined in need of replacement like Oakland Park, Neptune Park, Boat Ramp, Jones Playground, Clarkson Playground, Barclay Tot Lot, Columbus Park.

The estimated total project cost \$928,896.00 and the City is eligible for up to 50% grant match sue to a premium offering to overburdened communities subject to adverse cumulative stressors. There is room there to do more but need good bones to start with.

We are open for comments, feedback, and questions. We, along with the State want to know your thoughts and comments. We will respond to everyone once of your comments on this park as part of the process.

Public Comments

James Melton, 325 Elm Avenue – Inquired about specifics of the proposed features i.e., pavilion dimensions; benches; design choices; and lighting. Expressed gratitude and positive view overall. (13' x 15'; There will be benches; Park has good bones to build on; There is currently limited lighting with the development areas, per ERI).

Pamela Dennis, 423 York Street – Questioned parking; safety amid activity and street crossings; Asked whether the school would serve as a community center. (The existing parking remains, on street; The fence will be upgraded for aesthetics and for safer entrance/exit access points; unclear on facilities use; The grant is restricted to improvements for site, not the right-of-way, per ERI).

Natasha, 323 Clarkson Street – Raised safety concerns, highlight a recent murder and questioned gun violence (topic unrelated to hearing, per Police Chief). Questioned accessibility to bathrooms and preserving the legacy of the Allen School, before returning the topic of violence (latter ruled

not germane by Solicitor) and ended by seeking clarity on the field use by all, not just some kids (ERI clarified that field will be multi-purpose and available to all youth sports teams. The field cannot be rated for football given it does not meet the sizing requirements. Bathrooms will be available during the operation hours of the William R. Allen School building).

Visha Thomas, 48 W. Broad Street – Emphasized the historic value of the Allen School and questioned how Burlington Island funds would be spent in support of project (BA clarified that the building, not the playground are on the historic sites list); what specific programming would take place at Allen School (general programming for kids and adults; summer camp, per BA/ERI); The basketball court is used frequently. Asked if this is a proposal or if it set in stone, who is the decision maker. (Right now, this is a concept plan. The Council will approve the plan. We are open to suggestions, per ERI). Pushed for community programming utilization and suggested having a computer lab, teaching Black history, urged (more) pavilion space, the need for outdoor bathrooms, and noted the public opposition on Facebook.

Beamer, York Street – Spoke in support of the renovation of the Allen School, but not underutilization. Expressed concern about removing basketball court; Emphasized the need for an indoor facility for year-round use. Cited local violence – shootings near children, bullets through homes and how kids need ongoing activities beyond church/community events; as he recalled his options as a youth growing up in Willingboro, specifically the JFK Center.

Claudine Conaway, 110 James Street – Shared personal history – attending the Allen School but was redirected to Boudinot. Noted community programming relies on volunteers; Encouraged sign-ups. Acknowledged Chief's presence and ability to give report on violence reduction highlighted Allen School's rich history.

Maricee Roderick, 209 E. Broad Street – Confirmed that she heard correctly that 2026 Summer Camp would take place at the Allen School (yes, per BA). Asked about approval stage and post-approval changes (This is a concept pan for submission, echoed the ability to make changes, per ERI). Suggested installation of an emergency police button for residents and a water fountain for the kids. Sought clarification on funding model (\$465k City contribution with a dollar-for-dollar match by State, other suggested uses, for programming dollars, may require upfront, capital budget funding and every year thereafter, per ERI) and whether indoor space was considered (too costly > \$4M, grants max \$750k, per ERI).

Malachi T., 302 E. Federal Street – Nostalgic about Allen School as community staple but concerned about reconstruction losing culture. Questioned whether the function as a community center would be open to all (managed by the City staff/scheduled programming, yes, per BA). Inquired about curfew, gates, and access (gate will not close, park will follow same curfew rules as the rest of the City, per BA/ERI).

Ernest Turner, 34 W. Fourth Street – Long-term resident/coach and community volunteer post-war return from 1970-2006. View the project as improvement from previous gravel/tennis court, calling it 21st century design, good state matching funds. Parental supervision is key for kids' safety.

Gabrielle Hodgson, Deputy Municipal Clerk and City Resident – Advocated slowing of process for considerations and concerns shared; as well as consultation with sports Commissioners/Rec leaders on actual versus perceived needs – in this instance and future. Gave context on soccer field relocation, in capacity as the current Soccer Commission. Emphasized volunteerism and the need for additional lighting.

Council Comments

Councilwoman Wirth focused on the playground renovation and school reuse for education/community purposes. Stressed maintaining historic value through displays like photographs, consistent with practices of other City buildings such as Lyceum Hall.

Councilman Ballard shared how the project is the culmination of a long-term effort to preserve the school and its legacy– while arguing that the alternatives, such as doing nothing, are worse. Addressed parental safety concerns, noting that widespread insanity (violence) can't be fully stopped. Shared personal history (born 1947, lifelong resident, recalled 1990s violence). Noted budget limits prevent hiring of more staff, questioned if critics would volunteer. Thanked residents for their input.

Councilwoman Woodard recalled attending Allen School before sharing personal experience with violence (bullet through house) and echoed that insanity can't be stopped. Defended the project outlining the financing secured to restore a derelict building, how there's no loss of historical value, and value-add of creating a beautiful community center with playground enhancements.

Councilman Chachis attended the groundbreaking of the Allen School restoration and the emphasis placed, even then, on preserving its history. Urged continued focus on its history. Inquired about ensuring space for portable, outdoor bathrooms.

Councilman Hutton distinguished school and park as separate but related. As a long-time resident, praised overdue park rehabs. Called for a city study on recreational areas for youth sports. Agreed on preserving Allen School history/spirit but expressed concerns that African American voices/community input often feels excluded from rehabilitation efforts. Advocated for volunteer-facilitated programs, parental involvement beyond drop-offs, and better community access to design/input. Raised borrowing/financing concerns related to both this project and the Walnut Street project.

Councilman Spaulding acknowledged that as a newer resident to the City that he is still learning about the Allen School, but values its mission, legacy, and meaning to the community. Expressed concern over shootings, while supporting improvements without letting safety fears block progress – urged ongoing safety conversations. Called for clearer communication about building uses to reduce concerns. Echoed Councilwoman Wirth sentiments about using photos and displays to educate public on school's history.

Council President Bergner-Thompson expressed happiness for kid-focused improvements emphasizing kid's need more outdoor activity. Noted project spans multiple mayors-long overdue and how these types of project's importance to the community. Clarified fence design

(lowering/more-decorative/picket-style, per ERI). Inquired as whether the State looks favorably upon these types of projects for future funding opportunities (yes, per BA).

DISCUSSION

Residential Use Classification

Councilman Chachis questioned the location of zones (all concentrated on High/Broad Street, per ERI).

Councilwoman Woodard expressed desire to reduce the number of sober living homes in the area and discussing the current clustering of five (5) homes on one block.

Councilman Spaulding questioned whether the current discussion was driven by the Fair Housing Act (not compelled by the Act, but worth discussing proactively; lack of Land Use review creates issues; State changes are also forthcoming; proactive approach consistent with other towns, per Solicitor/Council President/ERI). Echoed Councilwoman Woodard's concerns about not wanting to increase the number (this would give structure, establish a high burden for applicant, and ensure only serious operators proceed, per ERI).

Council Present Bergner-Thompson emphasized the current lack of structure for the process/point of entry for these homes entering the community but called sober living homes generally a good thing for both residents and the town.

COUNCIL COMMENTS

Councilman Chachis circled back on the summer recreation and the timing of the portal registration opening for families (typical timing, per BA).

Councilwoman Woodard extended condolences to Tom Swan regarding the passing of his mother. Proposed an "open session" for 1/1 conversations with constituents on Tuesdays before Council Work Sessions, to allow residents to share ideas/concerns formally – noted that it would be less than a Council quorum in attendance.

Councilwoman Wirth raised several concerns and questions: (1) Who enforces the snow-covered sidewalks (several violations have been issued, per BA); (2) Status of installation of defibrillator at the Keegan Center (will be addressed tomorrow, per BA); (3) Whether camera is operational at the near-miss incident described by resident Ms. Lado and clarification as to whether violations can be issued only in real time, or after footage review (can be issued in both instances, or when a complaint is filed, per Chief); (4) Requested that Council schedule a presentation similar to the hearing tonight to review the plans for the Allen School itself, separate from the park; and (5) Inquired about voting tally board.

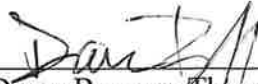
Council President announced that the Food Bank of South Jersey will be at Kennedy Park on February 14th while noting that many food banks are closed due to the holiday. Thanked attendees for coming out.

ADJOURNMENT

Upon the motion of Councilwoman Woodard, seconded by Councilman Ballard, this meeting of February 10, 2026, was adjourned.



Cindy A. Crivaro, RMC
Municipal Clerk



Dawn Bergner-Thompson, President
Common Council