

SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES
Audubon Family Park Improvement Plans Public Hearing
January 20, 2026
6:00 p.m.

Mayor Jakubowski called the meeting to order.

MAYOR JAKUBOWSKI READ THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT: "Notice of this meeting has been provided in a legal notice published in the Courier Post and the Retrospect; and posted in accordance with Title 10 of the New Jersey Statutes Annotated, specifying a 7:00 p.m. meeting time; and that formal action may or may not be taken at all Caucus and Commissioners' meetings".

Those in attendance: Mayor Jakubowski, Commissioner Wendell, Commissioner Alemi, Solicitors Sal Siciliano and Jennifer McPeak, Borough Administrator/Municipal Clerk Danielle Ingves, Randolph Callaway, Superintendent Public Works

Mayor Jakubowski led the audience in the Flag Salute.

This public hearing outlines a strategic, multi-year plan to enhance Audubon Family Park with a focus on inclusivity, guided by community feedback and funded through various grants, including a prospective Green Acres grant. The discussion covers preliminary survey results, the phased implementation approach for new equipment, specific public suggestions, and logistical considerations for procurement and park management.

A motion was made by Commissioner Wendell to open to the public, seconded by Commission Alemi. All in favor motion carried.

Grant Context and Public Engagement Process

The meeting was convened to fulfill the public engagement requirements of a Green Acres grant application, which mandates public meetings and surveys. The commission has opted to exceed this requirement by holding two public hearings. The first hearing was rescheduled to February 10th to comply with the grant's timeline. A community survey was launched to gather essential input and has been active for just under three weeks.

To ensure the survey data can be processed and incorporated into the plan ahead of the hearing, the survey will close on January 26th. This provides a 15-day window for analysis. While the state's decision on the grant is not expected for several months post-submission, the project is already underway, supported by a committed \$65,000 state grant and a \$25,000 county grant. The Green Acres grant requires a 25% match, which can be met through current project spending and donations.

Preliminary Survey Findings

Initial results from the community survey show strong public interest and provide a clear direction for park improvements. As of the meeting, 60 responses had been received in under three weeks from a diverse demographic, with ages ranging from under 18 to over 65. A significant 78.3% of these respondents are regular park users.

The feedback highlights a strong demand for inclusive playground additions. A question regarding this topic received 56 responses, with community members expressing interest in:

- Enhanced general accessibility
- Sensory and freestanding play structures
- Moving play equipment
- Wheelchair-accessible features
- More shaded play areas

Detailed question-by-question results from the survey were made available on paper for meeting attendees, with a comprehensive summary provided on the final page.

Phased Strategic Plan for Park Inclusivity

The park improvement project is envisioned as a long-term, strategic initiative designed to unfold over several years, rather than as a single, grant-dependent undertaking. The overarching goal is to transform Audubon Family Park into a more inclusive and contained space for a broader population, including children with autism and their caregivers. This vision will be pursued in phases, with the project likened to a puzzle where new pieces are added each year.

The Green Acres grant would accelerate this timeline, but the plan will proceed regardless. Key components of the strategic plan include:

- **Phased Equipment Replacement:** Older playground equipment that is still safe will remain for now. New, inclusive equipment will be added to expand the park, and older pieces will be retired only when they can no longer be safely maintained. The primary area of focus extends from the oldest equipment section back towards Memorial Grove.
- **Inclusivity and Safety:** A major priority is enclosing certain areas to ensure the safety of children who may wander, particularly those with autism. The plan also includes adding more resting areas for caregivers.
- **Long-Term Funding:** The strategy incorporates leveraging the county's annual \$25,000 open space grant to ensure continuous, predictable funding that can sustain the plan beyond the tenure of current officials.

- **Sponsorships:** A sponsorship package is being developed to offer naming opportunities for park elements like benches and signs, creating an additional revenue stream to offset costs.
-

Public Input and Feature-Specific Discussions

The hearing included a productive exchange of ideas between the public and the commission. One suggestion was the creation of a "safety town" by Amy Liberi, 167 Paris Ave, Audubon, with miniature city streets, which could also be made wheelchair accessible. This prompted discussion about exploring specialized grants for such a feature. Another participant proposed adding an educational layer to the park experience by creating a laminated bird scavenger hunt to encourage observation.

The commission also provided an update on an upcoming intersection improvement project near the baseball field, funded by a separate state grant. The project, which has a planning meeting scheduled for Thursday, will involve widening the curb, adding crosswalks, and installing new stop signs to enhance safety.

Discussions also touched on environmental and land-use constraints. The area near Green Wavey Field was deemed challenging for development due to potential wetlands and an existing "paper road." However, a temporary greenhouse may be installed in the area using federal grant funds, complementing the existing rain garden built by Sustainable Audubon.

Gloria Jensen, Luke's Place and a resident, 543 W. Kings Highway, is here to support the initiative and suggested larger pieces of equipment for special needs adults to play.

John Polerio, 47 Beloit, asked for clarification of the grant regarding how much

Operational and Logistical Considerations

The commission detailed the practical and administrative framework for the park's development. To streamline procurement and ensure value, the project will primarily use vendors on state contract, which have been vetted for quality and pricing, thereby avoiding complex bidding processes. While they trust their engineers to find cost-effective solutions, the commission remains open to sourcing specific, highly-desired items from other vendors, such as a uniquely copyrighted communication board that must be purchased directly from its creator.

The project's total cost is yet to be finalized and will be determined after integrating all survey feedback and engineering assessments. The requested grant amount is expected to be in the six-figure range (e.g., \$200,000-\$300,000), with every \$50,000 requiring a \$12,500 match. Plans are

being carefully reviewed to ensure full ADA compliance, including a directive to add a second ramp to a structure that currently has only one.

Regarding park amenities and policies, the following points were addressed:

- **Amenities:** Grilling stations have been permanently removed due to safety concerns. There is a recognized need for more benches, shade trees, and general seating.
- **Restrooms:** The public restrooms are now open daily from 9:00 AM to 7:00 PM. Following initial incidents of vandalism, security has been enhanced with additional cameras and warning signs, which has proven effective. The restroom doors lock and unlock automatically.

A motion to close the meeting to the public was made by Commissioner Wendell and seconded by Commissioner Alemi. All in favor motion carried.

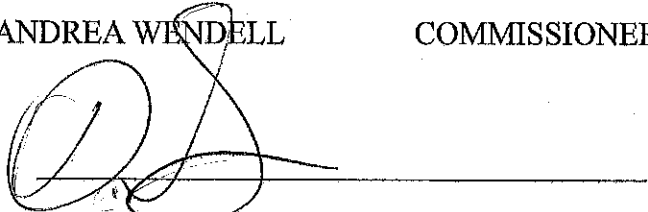
Motion was made by Commissioner Wendell to adjourn the meeting at 6:37 pm and seconded by Commissioner Alemi. All in favor motion carried.


MAYOR ROBERT JAKUBOWSKI


COMMISSIONER ANDREA WENDELL


COMMISSIONER DAVID F. ALEMI

ATTEST:


DANIELLE INGVES, MUNICIPAL CLERK

DATE:

February 3, 2026