

Florence, New Jersey
December 8, 2010

The Florence Township Council held a special meeting on the above date in the Municipal Complex, 711 Broad Street, Florence, New Jersey.

The meeting was called to order by Council President O'Hara at 6:30PM. President O'Hara led the Salute to the Flag.

The following statement was read by the Township Clerk: "Notice of this meeting has been given in accordance with the Open Public Meetings Act. Notice was published in the Burlington County Times on November 7, 2010; given to the Register News for information on November 4, 2011. Notice was posted on the Municipal Bulletin Board."

Upon roll call the following were found to be present:

Frank Baldoressi
Sean Ryan
Jerry Sandusky
David Woolston
Dennis O'Hara

Also present:

Mayor William Berry; Richard A. Brook, Township Administrator; Thomas A. Sahol, Assistant Municipal Administrator; William John Kearns, Jr., Township Solicitor (7:30PM); Joy M. Weiler, Township Clerk

CITIZENS CAMPAIGN PRESENTATION: RENE KOUBIADIS

Council President O'Hara introduced Rene Koubiadis, Representative of Citizens Campaign. Ms. Koubiadis explained that she is the South Jersey Coordinator for the Citizens Campaign, which is a statewide movement of hundreds of volunteers who are dedicated to recruiting, educating and mentoring regular citizens to give them the knowledge to become involved in their local government. The Citizens Campaign started over 10 years ago. The chairman and founder was the Middlesex Freeholder and Democrat Chairperson for Middlesex County. He had worked himself up from local positions to county positions. He saw the corruption that surrounded the State of New Jersey and realized he could not do anything from within the political structure, so he stepped down and he and his wife began the Citizens Campaign Organization. Ms. Koubiadis explained that the organization is trying to create a culture across the State of NJ to counter the culture of corruption that exists.

Ms. Koubiadis noted that she has lived in Florence Township for six years and has not been involved with the elected officials or administrative staff until December of last year but has been very impressed.

Ms. Koubiadis explained that government decides when to raise the taxes, how much debt will be permitted and many other important decisions. She believes it is important for the residents to understand the power structure and how decisions are made in order to be involved and a part of the decision making process. They have found that citizens that have information get involved and work with the elected officials on solving issues in the community.

Ms. Koubiadis stated that Citizens Campaign has identified four (4) specific leadership services that applies to every community across the state:

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- Citizen Legislator: Someone that has the know how to effectively propose new laws and policies to the town.
- Appoint a Member to a Board, Commission or Authority: This is the path that will be focused on this evening.
- Political Party Committee Members: It is very easy to get a seat. When they have done surveys over the past several years, they have found that a third of the seats across the state were vacant.
- Certified Citizen Journalists: Is the newest path they have identified. Years ago when she would attend Council Meetings there would be a newspaper reporter present to report on what was going on. Unfortunately, there are far fewer reporters and the papers do not have the staff to cover Council Meetings. The residents are not getting the information. Citizen journalists would be able to keep the residents informed.

Ms. Koubiadis stated that last year Citizens Campaign was successful in having the Citizens Service Act adopted into state law, which opens up the process for regular citizens. It established, in every town, a directory of all the Boards and Commissions, who is serving on them, their terms and whether there are any vacancies. There is also a standard application and standard application procedure for every town.

A slide presentation was shown. Administrator Brook spoke during the presentation on the community, leadership, volunteerism, the boards and commissions in Florence Township. He discussed certain volunteers of the community: Mr. Kamienski, 10 McCay Drive, coordinated a parks beautification and clean up group; Steve Mognancki (who has passed away) a World War II veteran that pursued having new streets named for fallen veterans.

Council Member Sandusky noted Mr. Gene Olaff's start of the Florence Soccer Program which has grown over the years. He mentioned the Homes for Our Troops home that was built and how the community came together to help.

Council President O'Hara gave an overview of the Economic Development Committee. The County Freeholders and the County Economic Development Director, Mark Remsa have been supportive in working with EPA and the development of the former Roebling Steel Plant site.

Council President also noted that all of the appointments are made by either the Mayor or Council Members and if any one is interested in volunteering on any of the boards to contact the Mayor or any of the Council Members.

Rev. Vincent Moore, 422 W. Fourth Street, stated that there are sports available for the children of the township through the Recreation Committee but there are children that do not participate in sports and he feels it is imperative that there be a community center or activities for the youths that do not participate in sports. He suggested a Youth Commission be formed. Administrator Brook stated that the idea of a Youth Commission is a good idea. He understands that the Recreation Committee is extremely active in sports and there have been discussions about getting involved in theater arts programs but the reason it has not become a reality is due to the budget. Administrator Brook offered to have Rev. Moore come in and discuss further in 2011. Council President O'Hara explained that Rev. Moore was a member of the Economic Development Committee and at one time there was discussion regarding how to expand recreation with the opening of the Main Street Community Center but because of budget concerns, the township has not been able to open up the

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community center. It is the perfect venue for the arts and theater groups. Council President O'Hara, on behalf of the governing body, stated that their goal is to expand the arts because not all children are athletes. Once the community center is able to be staffed properly and opened for its full use that is one venue that will be pursued as far as the arts. Council Member Sandusky noted that there is a tremendous Boy Scout and Girl Scout program in the township. There have been numerous occasions where the Boy Scout who is going for Eagle Scout will come before Council with a plan to do community service in the township, such as plant trees, work on the concrete markers in the Village of Roebling and/or mark the mileage on the walking paths. Also, the Fountain of Life Church's Royal Rangers, a youth program, has worked cleaning up parks. Assistant Administrator Sahol noted that the Florence Township Fire Department offers resources to the youth of the community through a Fire Scout program that offers the opportunity to learn about medical and fire safety, which could lead to volunteering or a career in that field. He also noted that churches in the community also have opportunities for the youth of the community. Mayor Berry stated that Florence Township does not just limit recreation for the youth; they also provide some funding for the Senior Citizens Groups to help support their activities. Administrator Brook invited Rev. Moore to come in and discuss his ideas in 2011.

Administrator Brook gave an overview of some of the boards and commissions. He suggested that residents that are interested in serving attend meetings to see what they are all about and talk to current and past board members. He stated that there are board members that have served 10 – 15 years and they do it because they care about the community; they are volunteers and do not get paid. Council Vice President Baldorossi noted that there are other organizations in the community that residents can get involved with such as the garden clubs or coaching the youth.

Administrator Brook stated that the Planning Board and Zoning Board require the most amount of time. If a resident would like to volunteer but their time is limited, some of the other boards may be a better fit for them.

NOTE: 7:30PM William John Kearns, Jr. – Township Solicitor, present.

Administrator Brook explained that the governing body can create new boards or commissions. Residents can make a proposal to the governing body. He noted that Florence Township's governing body is very available and willing to talk.

Administrator Brook stated that vacancies on the boards will be posted on the township's website and anyone who is interested can call to express their interest.

Mayor Berry stated that each member of the governing body started out as a volunteer for the community, which led them to seek election to be in a township leadership role.

Administrator Brook stated that there are applications available to those interested in serving on a board. He noted that it is helpful to know a person's background because they may have experience in a certain field and can be matched up with what the individual likes to do.

Administrator Brook stated that the township has a better government when the residents of the community get involved.

Rev. Moore questioned the diversity on the boards and commissions. Administrator Brook stated that diversity is sometimes determined by those that are interested. The township does not go out

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and seek a particular individual or a particular location; it's about those that express an interest in the boards. Council President O'Hara believes the boards are diverse.

Council President O'Hara reviewed the various vacancies on the boards. He told residents not to be hesitant if they have never served before, all of the members on a board get involved and every voice matters.

Council Member Sandusky stated that years ago there was a Citizen of the Year Award, which was given to an outstanding volunteer. One year it was given to a woman named Irene Connors, who ran a canteen for teenagers every Friday night. That's what the community needs, a person to step up, organize and oversee such things. He noted that the governing body would bend over backwards for anyone that wanted to do good for the community.

Council Member Ryan stated that when he first got involved, before he was a Council Member, he was fresh out of college. The main point this evening is to express an interest, which is what he did. He started out volunteering on Economic Development, then the Environmental Commission and when he wanted to take on a larger role, he became involved with the Planning Board. It is time consuming but very interesting. You get to learn what is going on in the community and help shape a lot of the decisions in the community.

Administrator Brook stated that he believes volunteering in government is not service to your political party but service to your community. He noted that there are many volunteer opportunities with your local Representatives and/or Senator's office or outside of government such as in nursing homes and hospitals.

Ms. Koubiadis discussed the courses available through Citizens Campaign. All of the courses are online and can be taken in 15 – 30 minutes.

Ms. Koubiadis stated that just by attending this evening and expressing interest in the community those in attendance are already taking the first step. She offered to collect contact information and add those interested to the Citizens Campaign bi-weekly newsletter list, which provides a lot of information. She stated that they have a website that is very informative.

Ms. Koubiadis noted that if anyone is interested this evening, there are applications available. She noted that they also provide mentors, who are government experts that can help applicants become more successful in their pursuit of service. Administrator Brook is one of Citizens Campaign mentors. Ms. Koubiadis reviewed some of the benefits offered by Citizens Campaign.

Council President O'Hara stated that he believed it is important for the public to know that the School Board is a separate entity from the Mayor and Council and the school generates a majority of the tax dollars. He noted that the governing body has residents that come before them with concerns regarding their tax bill; they should also go before the Board of Education. Council President O'Hara welcomed the public to the Council Meetings and stated that Council meets the first, second and third Wednesdays of the month.

Ms. Koubiadis provided a list of contacts at the N.J. State level. She also provided her business card if anyone had any questions. She noted that she lives in Florence Township.

Ms. Koubiadis thanked everyone for attending this evening.

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Mayor and Council expressed their appreciation to Ms. Koubiadis for putting the presentation together and attending the meeting.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Pat Macon, Hainesport, NJ, commended Florence Township for hosting the presentation, and stated that it was refreshing to hear that the governing body is willing to work with volunteers and hoped that Hainesport Township does the same. She noted that there were a few Hainesport residents present. She noticed that as each member of the governing body spoke, all of the other members turned towards that member and really listened to their fellow Council Member, which was also refreshing to see.

Council President O'Hara noted that Florence Township Council is made up of Democrats and Republicans but once the campaign to be elected is over and they each take their seat to represent the community, that all goes away. They all work well together and respect each other all for the benefit of the community. He also commended the administrative staff of the township.

Council Vice President Baldorossi thanked everyone for attending and thanked Ms. Koubiadis and Administrator Brook for the presentation. He wished everyone a Happy Holiday Season.

Mayor Berry also thanked Ms. Koubiadis for the very informative presentation. He noted that volunteering is a very gratifying experience.

Council President O'Hara thanked everyone for attending and welcomed them to stay for the Council Meeting. He wished everyone a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

All residents having an opportunity to be heard, MOTION by Sandusky; seconded by Woolston to close the public portion of the meeting. All ayes - motion carried.

8:05PM MOTION by Baldorossi, seconded by Sandusky to adjourn to Executive Session. Roll call vote - all ayes. Motion carried.

ADJOURNMENT

8:05PM: Meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

JOY M. WEILER, RMC/MMC
Township Clerk

/mab