

Florence Township Council Regular Session 7/13/22

Florence, New Jersey
July 13, 2022

The Florence Township Council held a regular meeting on the above date in the Municipal Complex, 711 Broad Street, Florence, New Jersey. Members of the public were invited to attend the meeting in person or electronically via Zoom.

The meeting was called to order by Council President Garganio at 7:00 p.m. Council President Garganio led the Salute to the Flag. Council held a moment of silence for Marge Rusnak who passed away this week. She was the Administrator's secretary through the 1980s and 1990s and was named Acting Administrator at different times throughout her career.

The Opening Statement was read by the Township Clerk: Notice was posted on the municipal bulletin board on January 7, 2022; published in the Burlington County Times on January 19, 2022, placed on the Township website and given to the Trenton Times for information on January 19, 2022.

ROLL CALL OF MEMBERS

Upon roll call the following were found to be present:

Present: Nicholas Haas, Kristan Marter, Paul Ostrander, Bruce Garganio

Also Present: Mayor Craig Wilkie; Stephen Fazekas, Township Administrator; Robert N. Wright, Jr., Township Solicitor; Nancy L. Erlston, Township Clerk; Jenise Silinsky, Deputy Township Clerk

Absent: Frank Baldorossi

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- Regular Session of July 6, 2022
- Closed Session of July 6, 2022

Motion of Ostrander, seconded by Marter to approve the minutes as submitted. Voice vote, Garganio Abstained – all ayes.

FINANCIAL CORRESPONDENCE

Motion of Haas, seconded by Marter to approve the following correspondence and the Treasurer's Bill List.

- Township Clerk's Monthly Report for June 2022
- Tax Collector's Tax Monthly Report and Water & Sewer Monthly Report for June 2022
- Treasurer's Bill List

Upon roll call, Council voted as follows:

- YEAS: Haas, Marter, Ostrander, Garganio
 - NOES: None
 - ABSENT: Baldorossi
- Unanimous vote – Motion carried

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REGULAR CORRESPONDENCE

None at this time.

APPLICATIONS

- A. Block Party Application from Rachel Lester to block off 7th Avenue between Main Street and Hornberger Avenue, Roebling on August 14, 2022 (rain date August 21, 2022) from 2:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.

Motion of Ostrander, seconded by Haas to approve the application. Voice vote – All ayes.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Council President Garganio opened the meeting to the public at this time.

Seeing no one wishing to be heard, it was a motion of Ostrander, seconded by Haas to close the public comment portion of the meeting. Voice vote – All ayes.

RESOLUTIONS

Township Auditor Reviews Annual Audit

**RESOLUTION NO. 2022-150
Approve Annual Audit for 2021**

Township Auditor, Michael Holt gave a brief overview of the financial statements and the 2021 Audit. An exit conference was held on June 29th with the Administrator and Treasurer and the report was discussed in detail. The Independent Auditor’s Report changed a little this year in the content and the layout and a new Statement of Holding Standards came out. The financials for the NJ municipalities follow the regulatory basis of accounting so under gap basis there is an adverse opinion on the unmodified opinion, that was rendered and that is the best opinion that could be rendered for the financial statements of the municipality. All of the balance sheets, income statements, savings, revenues and expenses are all fairly stated in accordance with the guidelines set by the Division of Local Government Services and he stated that a very good job was done there. He went over some financial highlights of the current fund and explained that the fund balance is up \$707,000 from the previous year which is a 38% increase as of 12/31/2021 which is really great for the fund balance and the current fund. The tax and utility rates were excellent at 98.95% and 92.5%. There was one recommendation – (Finding 2021-001, that the general ledger for all funds be accurately and completely maintained to ensure adequate control over the preparation of the financial statements and related footnotes). A corrective action plan has been approved and implemented. The audit went very well overall. The town is in really good shape and he thanked everyone for the courtesies that were extended to the audit staff to perform the audit.

Motion of Ostrander, seconded by Haas to approve Resolution No. 2022-150 to approve the Audit for 2021.

Upon roll call, Council voted as follows:

- YEAS: Haas, Marter, Ostrander, Garganio
 - NOES: None
 - ABSENT: Baldorossi
- Unanimous vote – Motion carried

ORDINANCES

None at this time.

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REPORTS OF COMMITTEES, BOARDS AND OFFICERS

Council Representative Marter stated that at a recent zoning board meeting there were some changes made to a project and it did not come back through the Environmental Commission. She asked if, once it comes to the Environmental Commission and they make their recommendations and then it continues on to the planning or zoning boards and changes are made, should it then go back through the Environmental Commission? Mayor Wilkie explained that the Land Use Law requires comments from the different groups. By Statute, a member of the Planning Board is at the Environmental Commission and that person's role is to communicate back and forth for that board. However, you cannot actually have someone from any other board be a part of the Zoning Board. There is a timeline from when the application comes in until the time action gets taken and then we need to hear comments back from the Environmental Commission. In theory everybody should be making comments. It will be looked in to and Solicitor Wright can touch base with Land Use.

Council Representative Marter asked the Township Attorney if Council is allowed to attend the public regional visioning meeting being held in Willingboro on July 27th. Solicitor Wright explained that while Council may attend, they cannot discuss anything that is going on at the meeting. Participation would be as a resident and sitting together afterwards or meeting in the parking lot and having any discussions regarding what was discussed should be avoided and any discussions should happen at a Florence Township meeting. Mayor Wilkie stated that we are going to be putting out a similar notice to try and encourage residents to attend. Administrator Fazekas stated that it will be posted on the township website, published in the newspaper and also on the Township Facebook page.

Council Representative Marter stated that in 2016 she and a bunch of residents came to a meeting to talk about exit 52 and Griffin Pipe and what they thought the impact would be. From there she met with different townships and assemblywomen and Senators and 6 years later we still have trucks running all though the town. She has been fighting to try and get something done here and she hasn't seen a whole lot going on up here. She stated that she has heard all of the solutions like roundabouts and bypasses but nothing is happening. She proposed that we have a joint public meeting or a special meeting with the county engineers, Burlington Township and Burlington City and we get together try and come up with a plan as to what can be done to get the trucks out of our town. There is a lot of money out there for infrastructure and we need to fight for it and make some changes here.

Council President Garganio stated that we should work toward such a meeting but the problem will be getting all of the shareholders into it. We have tried to meet with some of the communities nearby and it has been very difficult. We have been working and trying to get these communities together just with the bypass and other things that we have been trying to do and there is a lot of different interests out there. If we can find some way to do that and fix it now and get that bypass built faster to prevent that type of traffic coming through then it is worth looking into.

Mayor Wilkie explained that there were meetings before Covid with Burlington Township, Burlington City and the county where the main purpose then was Florence-Columbus and Route 130 and coming up with a direction of where that was going. That was the final meeting after years of meetings. It has been a goal of Florence Township for over 30 years and what we had been told then is that we have to come up with our own bypass to direct traffic somewhere.

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Council President Garganio stated that ultimately, we all agree and if we can set that type of meeting up and get them all in one room, that would be a good start. We can get the ball rolling with the county and the bypass and what we are dealing with the different communities. He stated that the tough part is that when the original infrastructure money was set up, it was earmarked for Florence and then the federal government decided that they were going to take all of the earmarks off and that took the \$30 million for Florence-Columbus Road out. That money is still there but it is controlled by the State. If we can find some way to put pressure to get more of it here, that would be positive.

Mayor Wilkie explained that Council passed a Resolution last July requesting the county, the township and the state take all trucks from Delaware Avenue and Front Street because Burlington Township stated that they didn't have the money for the bypass. We met with the county in the beginning of August and they wanted a meeting with Burlington Township and it took 6 months for Burlington Township to meet with them. We are working together now and we are on the same page from what we are being told and we have another meeting that is being scheduled to meet with one of the developers in order to get permission to move forward on the project. Florence Township will not commit money without the understanding that Delaware Avenue and Front Street get trucks removed. He stated that the bypass doesn't do any good if it does not get the trucks off of our roads. Congressman Kim tried to get Florence-Columbus and Route 130 earmarked and it got unearmarked but supposedly it is on TIP, the Transportation Improvement Projects, and they are waiting on the funding.

REPORTS: ADMINISTRATION

Mayor

Mayor Wilkie stated that the weather cooperated for Patriotic Day and it was a great day. He thanked all those who made it happen including Administrator Fazekas and Marty Eckert and, of course it wouldn't have been possible without the public attending and we are so very grateful.

Mayor Wilkie also stated that he received an invitation to Holy Assumption's 100th Anniversary celebration on August 14th. They are part of the Mary Mother of the Church Parish. He would like to get a Resolution prepared prior to the date and he asked that Council attend.

Lastly, Mayor Wilkie explained that at the last Planning Board meeting in June the Master Plan was approved. No public comments were made so at the July Planning Board meeting there will be a resolution memorializing the action taken.

Administrator

Administrator Fazekas stated that he is planning to have an ordinance prepared to purchase some equipment for Public Works and Water and Sewer and he would like to get all of the funding in place if Council is ok with this. Council agreed.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

A. Township Website

Administrator Fazekas explained that residents have been signing up on our website to receive the email notifications which are delivered around 4 p.m. each day. Some of the other issues with the website are still being worked on.

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B. Discussion – R.D. Wood Tot Lot

Mayor Wilkie shared responses received last year concerning the improvements to the R. D. Wood Tot Lot. There was some push back from some residents with concerns about the splash pad which was going to be located at the Marconi Triangle. Seeking guidance from Council he stated that we can get the engineer to continue to design and if the splash pad is of concern, we can always decide whether or not to move forward with it. He was just trying to do something different in that area and provide a different service than what is common. He explained that his thought of the splash pad was for the neighborhood, not something that would be a destination for the whole town to come to.

Council President Garganio stated that one of the advantages is having it centrally located and he doesn't see any issue with the splash pad and we can figure out where to fit the park and where it goes in the end. Mayor Wilkie stated that one suggestion was moving it closer to St. Paul's by the Housing Authority property which puts it across from the R.D. Wood baseball field and will create parking for those who are driving to it. We will go back to the engineer and move forward with some designs and look at pros and cons.

Mayor Wilkie stated that it is his understanding that the RFP/RFQ for the steel plant is pretty much finalized with the changes that have been suggested. He said that he believes the attorneys asked that we have public comment on it and, if Council approves, we can circulate one more draft or we can put it up on the website when it is finalized and ask for comments. Public comment is not necessary so the public can just send an email. The Planning Board at some point will be designing the guidelines so we can get it done in September. Regarding a timeline, he does not know how long something like this will take so that will need to be discussed. Administrator Fazekas explained that at the last meeting Council gave some suggestions for some minor changes that have all been implemented. The QPA added the language that she needed and then it was forwarded to Solicitor Wright to finalize and the hope is that it will be done shortly.

NEW BUSINESS

None at this time.

BOARD OF HEALTH

None at this time.

MISCELLANEOUS

None at this time.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Council President Garganio opened the meeting to the public at this time.

Mark Hollern, 324 East Front Street, stated his opinion on the issue of truck traffic coming through town. He stated that nobody is figuring out where things are coming from and going. There are all kinds of problems that just getting together with the next community won't solve. We have to figure out ways to manage the traffic. He said that Marty Livingston stated that a truck route could be created that would remove congestion from Delaware and Front and that would make Route 130, Dulty's Lane and River Road the truck route for Florence. That could then establish a 4-ton weight limit on Delaware and Front and then you could ticket those that are not doing local deliveries and a bypass is no longer needed.

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Council President Garganio stated we would do that in a second but a lot of people have to sign off on it. Mayor Wilkie said the resolution council passed last July called for that but the county and Burlington Township did not agree to it and that is where it stands.

Mr. Hollern also stated that on June 28, 2022 he noticed two Public Works employees “trimming and hacking away” at a 25-foot blue spruce tree on his property. He immediately called and left a message with Administrator Fazekas and Ted Lovenduski got back to him later that day and he was told that the trimming was being done for the parade to keep the streets safe for pedestrians and passersby. He stated that his tree did not extend over the sidewalk and that the township ordinances provide for the giving of notice and for the resident to have the responsibility of trimming their trees should they overhang rights of way. He stated that he never received a notice or time to remedy, even though his tree was in compliance with the law. He shared photos with Council and stated that in all of the 15-20 years that the township has held Freedom Funday, a Public Works crew has never been sent out to trim for the parade. He stated that in the days following the 28th he drove the parade route and shared some additional photos of trees that are overhanging the sidewalk and he had to duck under them in order to pass by. He is asking Council to replace the tree with a comparable specimen and bear the cost of replacing a total of two trees that were affected by the destruction. He stated that if he does not hear from Council, he will contemplate the next step.

Solicitor Wright explained in a situation where there is an allegation of a claim against the Township, we have an obligation under our insurance policies to report to our claims adjuster otherwise the adjuster could deny coverage. His recommendation at this time is to take the information provided and report it to the claims adjuster for them to investigate whether there is coverage and their determination of whether there is a liability of the Township. He will work with them in doing that and it may include having an arborist come out to inspect the tree in question. Administrator Fazekas stated that the Township Engineer has already been contacted and they do have an arborist on staff to get a quote for reviewing this tree and identify if damage has been done. He will touch base with Mr. Hollern as soon as he hears from the arborist for a convenient date and time so that he can be present. Mr. Hollern agreed.

Seeing no one else wishing to be heard, it was a motion of Ostrander, seconded by Haas to close the public comment portion of the meeting. Voice vote – All ayes.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion of Ostrander seconded by Marter to adjourn. Voice vote – all ayes. Meeting adjourned at 8:19 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Nancy L. Erlston, RMC
Township Clerk
/js