

Florence, New Jersey
February 8, 2025

The Florence Township Council held a Special Budget Session on the above date in the Municipal Complex, 711 Broad Street, Florence, New Jersey. The meeting was called to order by Council President Frappolli at 9:00 a.m. Council President Frappolli led the salute to the Flag.

The Opening 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 Sunday, February 2, 2025, given to the Courier Post for information on January 28, 2025 and posted on the Municipal Bulletin Board and the Township website on February 3, 2025.

ROLL CALL OF MEMBERS

Upon roll call the following were found to be present:

Present: Frank Baldorossi, John Fratinardo, Nicholas Haas, Talaya Loftin, Joseph Frappolli

Also Present: Mayor Kristan I. Marter; Thomas A. Sahol, Township Administrator; Robert Wright, Township Solicitor; Nancy L. Erlston, Township Clerk; Michelle Chiemiego, CFO; James Hoey, Code Official; David Wright, Public Works Superintendent.

Absent: None

PUBLIC COMMENT

Motion of Baldorossi, seconded by Fratinardo to open the public comment portion of the meeting. Seeing no one wishing to be heard, it was the Motion of Baldorossi, seconded by Fratinardo to close the public comment. Voice vote – All ayes.

BUSINESS

Review of the 2025 Municipal Budget.

Administrator Sahol explained the budget process and said that we would look at each department's 2025 Budget. He encouraged Council to ask any questions they might have regarding the Budgets.

Construction Office – Jim Hoey, Code Official

Mr. Hoey advised Council that one area of the Construction Office Budget that has increased for 2025 has to do with the implementation of E-Permitting. This program will allow people to submit and track their permits on line. The State of New Jersey has mandated that all municipalities offer this in 2025. Council Member Haas asked if we went out to bid on this? Administrator Sahol said this type of service is an Extraordinary Unspecifiable Service Contract (EUS). Our chosen vendor is a State Contract vendor so they have been vetted and approved by the state.

Administrator Sahol stated that one other item of the Construction Budget that shows an increase is scanning. Scanning is an on-going program that is taking out paper documents and converting them to electronic documents. Once documents are scanned, they are easier to access. This is very helpful in responding the Open Public Records requests.

Mr. Hoey thanked Mayor and Council for their support of the Construction Office.

Public Works Department – David Wright, Public Works Superintendent

Administrator Sahol advised Council that Public Works comes under several subsections in the Budget. The first subsection is Roads. This section includes vehicles, parts, tires, filter, as well as all equipment and maintenance contracts. This is a hard area to forecast because repairs to the street sweeper or leaf vac can be very expensive. We do preventive maintenance on the vehicles but if a resident puts sticks or metal items out mixed in with the leaf piles and the leaf vac pulls them in, the machine can be severely damaged. Repairs are very costly.

Administrator Sahol gave an overview of the types of line items under Sanitation, Buildings and Condominium Services Act, including maintenance on the street sweeper, clothing allowance, repair supplies like paint and light bulbs, Maintenance agreements for HVAC and pest control and emergency appropriation for demolition of abandoned buildings, if required.

Mayor Marter asked about the part time summer help. Administrator Sahol stated that the salaries for the summer help were covered by the Clean Communities Grant.

Administrator Sahol explained that there are condominiums in the township that do not get our maintenance services but the state says they are entitled to the service. The township reimburses the HOA's for a percentage of their bills. Mayor Marter asked if it would be more cost effective to do this work ourselves. Administrator Sahol responded that the HOA's expect a much greater level of service than we would be able to consistently provide.

Administrator Sahol asked Council to turn to the section for Parks. He advised that we are going to have issues with playground equipment in 2025. Public Works Superintendent, David Wright explained that much of the playground equipment is old and we are having a hard time getting replacement parts. We need to find a parts supplier for repairs.

Mr. Wright advised Mayor and Council that we would be installing new benches in Wilkie Park and doing some concrete repair work on the docks. He stated that we do as much of the work in house as possible.

Administrator Sahol directed Council to the Sanitation section of the Budget. He advised Council that the county had recently sent a notice that they will be charging to take mattresses and boxsprings at the landfill - \$20 each. The cost for portable toilets is going up as well; every portable toilet we add around town is \$1,000. We have a negotiated contract with Garden State Removal for our trash hauling. Most solid waste disposal companies won't even bid on our contract because they don't want to deal with the alleys.

Administrator Sahol asked Council to refer back to Construction to review the cost of fees. He said that we have not adjusted our fee schedule for permitting since 2012. These fees need to be reviewed and most likely need to be increased.

Police Department – Chief Brian Boldizar

Chief Boldizar spoke about the requested increase in his department's budget. Three new officers are being hired and the increase includes salaries, police academy tuition, uniforms and equipment. Also included are e-ticketing, radio equipment repairs and vehicle repairs.

Administrator Sahol gave an overview of the Emergency Management Budget.

Motion of Baldorossi, seconded by Haas to take a five minute break at 11:09 a.m. Voice vote, all ayes. Council returned to the order of business at 11:13 a.m.

Administration – Administrator Sahol

Administrator Sahol said there was a line item in Admin salaries for the addition of a Code Enforcement Officer. Currently our Code Office is only able to handle scheduled inspections. This new person will go out proactively and handle maintenance code inspections. They will also follow up on any complaints that impact quality of life for residents.

Council Representative Loftin asked about stipends for Ted Lovenduski. Administrator Sahol answered that the stipends cover duties that are outside of Ted's regular duties. He said that he is slowly pulling the stipends away and rolling them in to annual salaries but these remain for now. Council Representative Loftin questioned the stipend for Zoom operator and asked if we would still need the additional staff if we did not record the meetings on Zoom. Administrator Sahol explained that we record audio of all meetings through the FTR system. This recording is used to prepare the Minutes. The Zoom video was added during Covid to allow the governing body to hold open public meetings when we couldn't all be together. The Covid emergency is behind us now and many municipalities have stopped offering the Zoom option. Council had a discussion on the possibility of ending the live Zoom stream.

Administrator Sahol commented on the Admin Budget for the copy machine contract, postage machine, computers, IT support and general supplies. One large expense is for the Annual Florence Township Calendar.

Mayor and Council – Administrator Sahol

The OPRA program shows under the Mayor and Council Budget. We have a significant increase here as we are far exceeding the annual limit of OPRA requests permitted under the program we had with the portal company. Consequently, we had to step up to a larger package to meet our increased OPRA volume.

Clerk's Office – Nancy Erlston, Township Clerk

Mrs. Erlston stated that the budget for Elections has increased, Burlington County passes along costs to the municipalities.

Finance – Administrator Sahol

The township has historically done a weekly payroll. This is very time consuming and we issue paper checks which adds cost. Administrator Sahol asked Council to consider allowing the township to convert to a twice a month payroll and eliminating the paper checks and requiring everyone to have electronic transfer of pay. This will be a cost saving as well as a time savings change. Council agreed with this.

Tax Collection – Administrator Sahol

Administrator Sahol stated that postage has increased. There are new forms that the tax collector will have to mail out, plus the cost of the estimated tax bill mailings.

The Tax Assessor retired and we hired a new Assessor so you see a decrease in the salary for that department.

Administrator Sahol pointed out slight increases in the township's professional's salaries for Solicitor and Township Engineer. He stated that we will be doing a road program this year, updating some mapping, and deciding what to do about the old public works building.

Following the review Administrator Sahol stated that in order to maintain services and avoid cuts there will need to be a tax increase of 3 to 3.5 pennies for 2025.

Administrator Sahol stated that on Wednesday, February 12, 2025 at the Work Session meeting, Kent Jones will attend to answer any questions about the Water and Sewer Departments Budget for 2025.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further questions, motion of Fratinardo, seconded by Loftin to adjourn at 12:43. Voice vote, all ayes.

Respectfully submitted,

Nancy L. Erlston, RMC
Township Clerk