

Florence Township Council Executive Session 2/12/25

Florence, New Jersey
February 12, 2025

The Florence Township Council held an executive meeting 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 7:00 p.m. Council President Frappolli led the Salute to the Flag.

The Opening Statement was read by the Township Clerk: Notice was posted on the municipal bulletin board on January 3, 2025; published in the Burlington County Times on January 12, 2025, placed on the Township website and given to the Courier Post for information.

ROLL CALL OF MEMBERS

Upon roll call the following were found to be present:

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

Also Present: Mayor Kristan I. Marter; Thomas A. Sahol, Township Administrator; Thomas J. Hastie, Jr., Esq., Township Solicitor; Nancy L. Erlston, Township Clerk; Jenise Silinsky, Deputy Township Clerk

Absent: Frank Baldorossi

FIFTEEN (15) MINUTES OF PUBLIC COMMENT

Motion of Fratinardo, seconded by Loftin to open public comment. Voice vote – All ayes. Seeing no one wishing to be heard, a Motion was made by Haas, seconded by Fratinardo to close the public comment portion. Voice vote – All ayes.

BUSINESS

A. Second Avenue Parking Concerns

Julianna Babula, 139 2nd Avenue, stated that, upon Council's invitation to discuss the pros and cons regarding the current parking situation on 2nd Avenue she and a few residents wanted to voice their concerns. It appears to her that the letter sent out to the residents of 2nd Avenue has not helped alleviate the parking problems. She explained that parking lines were previously painted on the streets and that seemed to help but now the lines are faded. She also mentioned that "parking for residents only" signs were previously suggested as well as permit parking.

Administrator Sahol explained that if you do permit parking you have to determine a certain number of permits per household and he is not sure that the block permits enough spaces to allow two per household.

Don Cammus, 580 E. Sixth Street, stated that when the museum was founded, there was no place to park because of the permit parking on 2nd Avenue. So they worked with the previous administration and had that permit parking removed. Since then, the museum now has a parking lot.

Ms. Babula stated that when the museum has a function, they don't always use the museum parking lot and they park along 2nd Avenue. She asked why the museum does not have signs directing people to park in their lot. She feels as though residents only parking signs would be helpful.

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Administrator Sahol explained that anything done on the road where they have to delineate spaces will have to follow a design stamp and we can't deviate from what a typical parking space would be.

Township Engineer Mark Lodato explained that a minimum sized space in a parallel parking situation would be about 22-23 feet. In terms of the width, 2nd Avenue is about 30 feet wide so you can have two 7 foot wide parking spaces there with a 16 foot cartway in between which is acceptable. If you recreate the lines there will be no issue.

Administrator Sahol explained that he had received a few emails with comments/concerns from other residents of 2nd Avenue. One was a suggestion of diagonal parking which they assumed would promote additional parking so the engineer did a mock up of angled parking, which brought the parking spaces from 96 down to 54 so that theory was discredited. It is not only the number of spaces that causes the issue, but the safety of the angled parking as well. The roadway that you would be backing out into would be very narrow which would pose a safety issue. According to New Jersey Code, if it is 60 degree angular parking, the width of a parking space has to be 18 feet wide and this would only allow 12 feet of cartway, which is fine for one-way traffic but in terms of backing out and maneuvering, avoiding other cars parked there, etc. it is a hazard.

Mayor Marter mentioned that the issue with permit parking is that there are not enough spaces for each home to have 2 permits per household. The northern end of the block has driveways which starts to remove some of the available spaces. Previously 2 permits were issued per home but it was only on the lower block. Council Representative Loftin asked what is stopping us from re-painting the lines. Administrator Sahol explained that we don't typically delineate spaces like that in compact residential areas. Mayor Marter stated that a lot of the other avenues looked at this and decided against lining the parking spaces because you end up with fewer spaces because people will park and adjust based on the size of their cars.

Council discussed options to help including resident only parking signs to help with the problem when the museum has events, the repainting of the lines, having the museum send literature to event holders and utilizing the museum parking lot, etc. Council Representative Fratinardo asked how many parking spaces versus how many homes are currently there. The Township Engineer explained that he did a rough estimate of about 87 give or take. Administrator Sahol stated there are about 60 homes on that block and there are not enough spaces to give each home 2 parking permits.

It was a motion made by Haas, seconded by Fratinardo to have an engineering study of the parking done.

Upon roll call, Council voted as follows:

- YEAS: Fratinardo, Haas, Loftin, Frappolli
 - NOES: None
 - ABSENT: Baldorossi
- Unanimous vote – Motion carried

Stephanie Cammus, 2nd Avenue, asked if an overflow lot could be added on Hornberger Avenue at the end of 2nd Avenue to alleviate some of the issue. Administrator Sahol explained that the Township does not own that land, so that would not be an option at this time.

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B. Water & Sewer Director – Meter Replacement Program Update

Administrator Sahol stated that the water and sewer department is actively working on replacing the heads and/or any non-working meters. When you have 5,300 meters, you are going to have some that are not working, and in order to catch up on those you need to develop a meter replacement and maintenance program. The department is finally able to ramp up on that maintenance and replacement program so now we are looking into a policy decision.

Superintendent of Water & Sewer, Kent Jones and Superintendent of Water, Jeff Smith, explained that the heads are constantly putting out signals with the numbers of gallons that have gone through that meter and they read the heads by radio. Once that battery dies, it no longer sends a signal but the meter is still registering every gallon that goes through it. Because it is no longer transmitting it anymore they can't pick it up when they drive by. The first time they can't read it the homeowner will get an estimated bill and they go back and drop a door knocker asking the resident to call to have the meter replaced. Oftentimes, the residents never call. For example if the resident for the past six quarters has been using 20,000 gallons a quarter and they have only been getting billed for 12,000 gallons each quarter. Then when the meter is finally changed and the actual amount of water that went through the meter is 24,000 gallons in excess, they are looking at big bill.

There are 361 non-working meters at this time. Each quarter when the bills are processed a list of non-working meters is generated and we go out and knock on those doors and drop door knockers to try to get in to read the meter, but we don't have much success with that. Mayor Marter mentioned that there is no incentive to let them in to change the meter because if they are only getting charged the minimum they figure the longer they go the bigger break they're getting. Administrator Sahol stated that the only time they seem to catch up is when the resident goes to sell the house because the bill has to be satisfied because the title company requires it. He stated that in the past when it finally came time to pay and you couldn't afford it you were put on a payment plan. In good conscience he is having a hard time now because of the rate increase.

Council discussed possible solutions. Administrator Sahol explained that you don't realize the revenue until you collect it. It would compel people if we tell them by letter that explains their options and that they are on the verge of receiving a very high bill, they need to get it in so that we can get it right and get back to consistent billing on their system.

Mr. Smith stated that there has never been a policy or a standard operating procedure and these were always handled on a case-by-case basis. If there was something in writing it would make it a lot easier. Anytime they go into a house, when a house is sold or changes hands or someone requires a CO and they notice the meters have to be changed, they have the homeowner call to have the meter head changed. Council agreed to develop a standard to prevent these issues going forward. Administrator Sahol explained that we have a policies and procedures manual that can easily be amended by resolution versus having to do an ordinance. We can put a policy in place in the way in which we do the meter replacements. He will come back to Council with the language so they can understand how it will be applied. They will put it on as a resolution authorizing that it will be put in our policies and procedures manual so people can reference it.

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C. W&S Budget

Administrator Sahol gave an overview of the water and sewer budget and asked Mr. Jones and Mr. Smith to explain and answer any questions Council may have. Mayor Marter asked what is anticipated this year with the plant blower motor that we increased the appropriation in the budget over prior years. Mr. Jones explained that the two blower motors are from 2000 so they are 24 years old. You need a certain amount of air in the water to keep the bugs alive and, if one of the blowers fail, we have to get a temporary motor. It is a very important part of the process. He stated that they are looking to replace one and then maybe next year the other.

Council Representative Frappolli asked about the water tower cleaning. Mr. Smith explained that it is our practice to have the towers cleaned and inspected every five years even though there is no mandate on that. It is not anything that we will get fined on or anything but it is a good practice. The goal is to catch any premature erosion or a failure of the structure before the failure happens. Administrator Sahol stated that we meet water quality standards, it's just that they want to show that you actually inspect the tower.

Council Representative Loftin asked about the hydrant replacement program. Administrator Sahol explained that they are looking to replace 6-8 hydrants this year. Mr. Jones explained that they need to replenish the stock of hydrants.

Council Representative Loftin asked about the interest on the bonds, the requested amount is \$732,000 and the previous year was \$420,000. Administrator Sahol explained that we were in temporary bonding at the time and he pointed out there was another line in the budget for temporary and we just went to permanent bonding/financing. When you have to carry financing, you have to carry interest separate from principal. This takes into account the temporary and pushes it into permanent.

Administrator Sahol explained that he thinks we captured everything that is necessary in this budget taking into account what we know and what points of potential failure are and the plans for continued improvement. Anything that does not get used gets cancelled back and that puts us in a healthier position in the future and that is what staves off the rate increases for the future.

Council Representative Haas asked if the head works are included in the budget. Administrator Sahol stated that they will be included in an ordinance for future capital expenditure. When we get into the head works study, we have to create an ordinance based on what the anticipated expenditure would be. Then we will create an ordinance to create a bond and the section 20 cost will be included in that. He will know more in the next 5-6 months.

Council Representative Haas asked if there is a full list of potential capital projects. Administrator Sahol explained that we are obligated to move something forward for the NJDEP and Mr. Smith is working on that. He wants to have that done by the time it's ready for introduction. He stated that there is very little in the other departments so that he can have this to Council pretty quickly.

Mr. Smith gave a brief update on PFAS. He explained that they have to wait on lab results on all of the testing that was done last time. Once that is done the designing will start on the actual treatment process and the building. They are supposed to have that to submit for permitting by the end of July and between now and then there won't be anything happening.

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D. Parking Concerns – Florence Museum and Township Storage Facility West Third Street

Administrator Sahol explained that there are parts in the township code that specifically address additional parking facilities throughout the town but it is silent when it comes to the Florence Museum on West 3rd Street and the Community Center in Roebling. The Florence Historical Society operates the museum and they do an amazing job and, in addition to the Florence Museum that is there, the Daughters of the American Revolution meet there. It is nice that the building is getting used and the public is invited for different events throughout the year, but the difficulty is that the public is taking advantage of the parking there. The public doesn't realize that there are many volunteers that are in the building from time to time. Administrator Sahol indicated that he would be working with the Chief of Police to establish parking restrictions for the site. The Historical Society didn't ask for the entirety of the facility on both sides, they only indicated the west side that they need reserved for their purposes. But the balance of the other side lot could be used for any resident overflow parking. The recommendation is that we carve out parking for the museum and the building's function on the one side. Same thing with the other side, but allowing residents to park there and we would not ticket or tow them from that side.

At the Community Center, there is established parking on the alley side of the building and there is not a lot of issues with residents there. Something would have to be crafted that would indicate that during the times that the building is in use for the purposes of events, elections and things some parking restrictions would have to be established. He needs to work on something for these buildings and Council agreed to move forward and get an ordinance going on this.

ACTION

A. Resolutions

- 2025-56, Award Administrative Services Contract, Tax Office to J.H. Services, Inc.

Administrator Sahol explained that this is a third party that has been brought in for quite some time now. The assessor is not 5 days a week and when he is serving other functions a third party helps with the schedule and they also come in for court and work on our defense for us.

Motion of Haas, seconded by Fratinardo to approve Resolution No. 2025-56.

Upon roll call, Council voted as follows:

- YEAS: Fratinardo, Haas, Loftin, Frappolli
 - NOES: None
 - ABSENT: Baldorossi
- Unanimous vote – Motion carried

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Motion of Fratinardo, seconded by Haas to open the meeting to the public at this time. Seeing no one wishing to be heard, Motion of Fratinardo, seconded by Loftin to close the public comment portion. Voice vote – All ayes.

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ADJOURNMENT

Motion of Haas seconded by Fratinardo to Adjourn. Voice vote – All ayes. Meeting adjourned at 8:24 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Nancy L. Erlston, RMC
Township Clerk
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