

Florence Township Council Special Work Session 7/8/26

Florence, New Jersey
July 8, 2026

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, published in the Burlington County Times, the Courier Post and placed on the Township website on January 11, 2026.

ROLL CALL OF MEMBERS

Upon roll call the following were found to be present:

Present: John Fratinardo, Frederick Gabriele, Talaya Loftin, Gina Sullivan, 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: None

FIFTEEN (15) MINUTES OF PUBLIC COMMENT

Motion of Fratinardo, seconded by Sullivan to open Public Comment. Voice vote – All ayes.

Seeing no one wishing to be heard, a Motion was made by Loftin, seconded by Fratinardo to close the Public Comment portion. Voice vote – All ayes.

BUSINESS

- Juvenile Issues in the Community

Council President Frappolli explained that Council invited Clergy, Recreation, the Police and Fire Departments and the School Board to the meeting and acknowledged that the new Kiwanis organization was also in attendance. He stated that Council is aware of the problems going on in the Township, they have heard it and witnessed it.

Nancy Hoch, Principal of Riverfront School – stated that kids are not violent, they are just bored and need things to do. She thinks that kids are scared to do things that are not considered to be “cool” based on what they see on social media. The community needs to come up with ideas for them outside of the school building. In November, they started mentorship programs in the school and it has been a very big success. 71% of kids involved in the programs saw an improvement in grades and discipline. She thinks as a school and as a community we need to come together and think about things that are done in the school but on a bigger picture, like mentoring or Big Brother/Big Sister, and also set up structured events for them to participate in. And maybe include the kids that don’t see a future and reward them for the good that they do. Our parents in this community work hard and they need to know that people are looking out for their kids so it would be great to start some kind of mentorship program because when the school day ends and

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they go home, there is a lot of free time until their parents get home. She thinks we have a lot of great community members who can mentor these kids to do the right thing.

Ms. Hoch also stated that absenteeism and tardiness are a big problem in the schools and that the relationship with the SRO's and the Police Department is phenomenal. They meet all of the time to discuss things that they see in the schools, and they work together to come up with solutions.

Mayor Marter stated that we do a lot of activities within the town between sports and community activities and asked how to get people to show up because the kids that need structured events don't show up. Ms. Hoch explained that they have had 7 events at the school and maybe five parents attended. She also personally invited 26 families to an event because she thought they needed more support from the school, and one family showed up the first week and did not come back.

Michelle Boracci, 14 Tall Timber Lane, School Board Member – mentioned that, although the town does offer a lot of activities, the majority of those are athletic and not all students are athletes. And, as a town we don't currently support anything other than athletics. We have to find out what the students and kids want. She also mentioned that sports programs have a cost. But this is where we need to come together and see how we can support each other.

Chris Conti, Board of Education President – explained that social media does not allow kids to be kids anymore, and he thinks the value of being a child and the value of being yourself is being taken away from them. They are just kids, and they need to be treated like kids sometimes not the young adults that they think they are. He also mentioned that there may be some type of learning opportunity to enlighten them on how social media works.

Jocelyn Starr – stated that some of the activities at the high school extend past 5pm and there is no bus/transportation, and that causes a problem for the kids that want to be a part of those activities. Transportation needs to be addressed.

Nancy Hoch explained that a simple shared calendar between Recreation sports and things that the schools are doing could be helpful. It could be a simple way to start addressing the communication issue.

Matthew Boudwin, Student Ministries Pastor at the Fountain of Life and Headmaster of Life Center Academy - explained that the goal as a Student Ministries Pastor is to rally kids, especially middle and high school students from all the local districts. He believes there should be a mechanism within the school so that extracurriculars can communicate with the schools. He said that discipline does not belong to the police or Town Council or the parents or the schools, it belongs to the village. There needs to be an internal component within the township like a youth alliance that can speak to these things effectively and have intelligent people who actually care about the young people on that committee along with student participation. He said that people don't know how to mobilize it; we have to do less talking and more listening.

Council Representative Loftin asked if there is transportation to get to Fountain of Life. Pastor Boudwin explained that they have church vans that are run by licensed and approved people and they gather people from a few different districts. If he knows there is a pocket of students somewhere, he will send one of his youth staff. He wants the children to have something constructive to do and feel like they are more value than just the academic affairs. He also agrees that it is not just athletics, it is the arts, etc. and explained that the church has a fine arts program and they compete nationally. They also have photography, videography, theater, dance, drama, singing, instrumental, etc.

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Council Representative Loftin asked Pastor Boudwin if he has difficulty relaying this information to the schools and getting on the agenda or in their newsletter. He stated that he has had difficulty and that there is a need to have a conversation. Council Representative Sullivan asked Pastor Boudwin if he would be willing to bring an event to town, not at the church. Pastor Boudwin stated that he would gladly do so and would also sponsor the event.

Melanie Mieczkowski, 1000 West Fourth Street – believes that adult mentors could be helpful even if the kids had a contact number to text if something was going on or if they had concerns or just needed advice, etc., and offered to be a mentor. She thinks that an anonymous survey of some kind could be helpful, maybe the kids won't feel embarrassed or nervous if it's anonymous. She thinks that one of the things that could be of interest to kids may be teaching them how to navigate social media, video classes, photography, and how to set up AI.

Michele Boracci stated that all of the things being discussed may require a subcommittee or a task force of sorts. One of the things that they have struggled with in the school district is communication and Facebook is not the kids' social media of choice. There are generational differences in how kids are operating on their phones and we need to fix that. She said that the Scouts would try to have community programs that they were sponsoring and no one would show up because the only mechanism they had to communicate was through Facebook. Communication problems and transportation issues need to be fixed and there aren't enough bus drivers even to do the routes that they have.

Caren Cullen, 325 Chestnut Street – stated that she thinks there needs to be a committee of professionals, parents, young adults and high school kids focused just on this. They can bring ideas in and come together to focus on these issues. Whether it is a volunteer group or it is funded.

Council Representative Loftin asked if there could be a program where the Student Council is doing these things and reporting back to the meetings as part of a community service. Or can we create it and utilize the Student Council members in being more active in government and speak up for the students and kids. Ms. Hoch explained that it would be a great idea but usually the kids who sit on Student Council sit on many other things and their time is already limited. She believes we need to get kids involved to take ownership of the community that are not already sitting on Student Council. We have to get other kids involved so it's not the same five kids.

Ms. Cullen further explained that we need the right social media because kids are not on Facebook and she thinks we need a town Tiktok account. She also thinks we need to be consistent and have events or activities at a certain building at a certain time on the same day of the week each time. And these need to be things that they want to do, not things we think they want to do.

Council Representative Frappolli explained that this is going to be an ongoing discussion, it is not just going to be a one and done type of situation. He likes the idea of the Youth Alliance and having all age groups represented and then there is a program that is in place and ongoing.

Rachel Lester, stated that she has served on three different PTOs in the district and we can plan all of these events and committees, but if you are not reaching the same kids that everyone is talking about, it won't work. She asked the police department if they are holding these kids accountable, if there are consequences, and if there are extra services to help parents find programs for assistance. She believes that parents eventually have to be held accountable.

Council Representative Loftin asked the police department to explain the limitations that they have when trying to hold juveniles accountable according to the law in New Jersey. Police Sergeant Shafer explained

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that he deals with a lot of our juveniles across the board and the biggest issue faced is that there are no consequences for these kids. When he first started, if you got in trouble for a minor event (stationhouse adjustment), you got one slap on the wrist and after that you got charged. That is not the case anymore and they know now that they get a couple of stationhouse adjustments, and they know what the consequences are and what they can get away with. Not only that, but at home these kids are not getting in trouble. They call parents and they don't care; they blame the police and want to know why their kids are being bothered which makes it difficult. He asked how you can try to make those kids better if they are not expected to do it at home. They can only do what they can when they have them and it is on the parents when they go home.

He explained that they had over 20 different stationhouse adjustments in the school district this year. In their program, as consequences they must come back and clean the building after school is over. The officers then spend time with them, get to know them and find out what is going on and why they are participating in this behavior. Almost like a mentoring situation because they are engaging them the whole time. He said of all the kids that got in trouble this year, there were no repeat offenders.

They also have a lot of issues with kids that are not residents of the township. They are either getting on the train or they are coming here because they have family members in town and their parents are not even around. If they have had to take kids home, sometimes there isn't anyone there, the parents don't even know where they are. And when you call them, they won't come to pick them up. The parents that are present and come to the events are the ones who care, they don't want their kids to get involved in this type of behavior. Kids make mistakes but the police officer's goal is to try to prevent them from making the same mistakes over and over again. Some kids grow up in an environment where they deal with the police a lot because of their family members and then there is distrust there, so they have to break that wall down. That is why it is important to have officers in the schools because they do a great job of that. But it is difficult if their home life is not great and they have nothing to look forward to. It all comes back home and there is only so much you can do.

Caitlin Summers Motta, 6 McCay Drive – asked Sergeant Shafer at what point the DCP&P is called. Sergeant Shafer explained that if the parents refuse to pick the kids up that is an automatic call. In some circumstances the parents are home but they are not really active so that is not a DCP&P call. They are there, they have food, they're clothed but they are just not being parents. They do contact them at times when they need to, and the school does as well. They are in constant communication, they go by the houses and do well-being checks but if they are refusing to be a parent then it is very difficult.

Lisa Fillippine asked if there is something outside of the school year that we can offer that has those same types of consequences, like community service for the action even though they are not in school. Sergeant Shafer stated that in the summertime they have them do some type of clean up, like the dug outs or the parks. They just do it in the school when they cause destruction in the building.

Chief Boldizar explained that there are certain things that they cannot do by law, it has to come through the courts. He explained that he spoke with a chief in another, larger town, who enacted an ordinance for charging parents when their juvenile gets locked up and he said they had only charged 6 out of 24 juveniles. It is a process; they have the Prosecutor's Office involved and they have a whole juvenile unit that does a review before the charges go through.

Kim Bernardon, 23 Amboy Avenue – suggested more nights like the free pickleball event like kickball, baseball, softball, arts and music, a jam band type of event, a community art program, coming together to make art to display around the community, art contests, community block parties, school bike rides, maybe

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a movie night in the park. It is about building connections with these kids and meeting people and families that may possibly make a child have some respect for their neighbors.

Helen Lykes, 127 2nd Avenue – agreed with what everyone is saying but stated that our police department is backed into a corner and not much can be done. Kids know they can get away with whatever they're doing because they are only going to get a little slap on the wrist. She feels as though she can't go and use the parks facilities with her grandkids because of the activity that is going on there. She believes parents should be held accountable.

Robert Ward, Pastor of St. Paul Baptist Church – stated that it is not enough to put a program together, it needs to be accessible. He said that family dynamics plays a role in everything that is going on. Our youth are the most important and they should be at the top of the list. A lot of parents now, if their kids are on devices and content and quiet then everything is ok but what are they receiving from those devices. The community has to come together.

Lisa Fillippine spoke to the accessibility issue that we have. We have great building resources, and she thinks it is very short-sighted to assume that any programming developed for kids has to be done in only one location. She recommended an art class, or music class, STEM or a hike, that changes location every week. The options are endless and we have a lot of adults who want to help out so finding consistent volunteers should not be difficult. We have great sports but not every kid is a sports kid. If our children see that we are limiting them based on what their parents are able to do for them in terms of transportation then they will continue to grow up feeling unseen and disconnected and we will continue to see these behavior issues. She said that she thinks it shows the community that Council is willing to meet the community where they are by bringing the programs to different areas of the town which goes a long way when you are trying to connect with people.

Caitlin Summers Motta spoke in regards to the Community Center and asked if there is a way to engage our community partners like Kiwanis, the churches and clergies in town and allow them access for their groups one or two times a year in trade for hosting something a couple of times a year. It could also be for housing the new youth organization. We can try and barter to get volunteers at the building during these events.

Lisa Askew and her son Steven, 19 Wilbur Henry Drive – recommended a parent group where maybe parents can meet within the community and talk about what is going on or share ideas. She also mentioned maybe offering incentives for participating in a youth "council" type of group like a free cookie at lunch, sport tournaments or video game tournaments, etc. She recommended a community dinner and clubs like a Lego club or an engineering club and maybe parents would be willing to volunteer.

Melanie Mieczkowski said that if parents are working a lot, maybe they don't know what to do with their kids. We need to help find resources for parents.

Carina Vargas, 50 Riverside Avenue – spoke about bullying in the schools and how it has affected her family. Council President Frappolli explained that we know there are many problems including bullying but we are looking into things that we can put into place. He said it is not just here, the entire country has a problem with the youth. Ms. Vargas mentioned having a juvenile type court sponsored by the Township and maybe use members of the community or high school seniors and present the problem and then there could be consequences such as community service. Chief Boldizar explained that there would be no way to make them attend.

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Clark Boyd, 31 East Fourth Street – stated that he would like to see a youth engagement committee started with representation from every part of the community; parents, grandparents, students, teachers, police officers, local government officials, business owners, coaches, civic organizations, senior citizens, healthcare professionals, community volunteers, etc. Then they need to get up to speed on how to communicate; establish a social media platform for communication so they can advertise different activities, dates and times, etc., to get participation in these activities. He also recommended breaking the youth into age groups and having different activities based on age. He thinks clean up and gardening should be part of the activities and not the punishment and maybe it will give them a source of pride.

Brian Gadus, 91 Creekwood Drive – stated that you can do all the things for the kids, but if it's events where the parents need to take them it is likely that the parents probably won't take them even if given the opportunity. He said you have to get that one thing that is going to attract a collection of kids and then drawing in that one kid who is teetering. Once you have that, then you can start to find out what else you can do. He also mentioned that there can be a private server for video game tournaments by invite only and that incentivizing may help to get people to move. He would also like to see more Scouting in town.

Mayor Marter explained that there are a lot of great ideas but that the community has to come together to make these things happen.

Bridget Weiss, 6 Fillipponi Court, President of Kiwanis Club of Florence – explained that Kiwanis is an international organization of volunteers dedicated to improving the world one child and one community at a time. The goal of Kiwanis starts in elementary school, teaching the children values through service and projects of leadership. There are also programs for middle school, the builder club, and high school, the key club. They act as liaisons and can go in and work with the students during the school day which also helps with the transportation issue. They have 30 members in this new group so far, and they have been involved for over 20 years in surrounding towns and, after 25 years living in Florence they decided to bring it to Florence. They are looking forward to helping the community in working with the schools.

Council President Frappolli stated that he believes the biggest challenge is to initiate those young people who believe the rules don't apply to them and the consequences are not there. Maybe there is some way to hook them to become a part of something where they can do some positive things. Ms. Weiss said that they are hoping that starting in elementary school will help to build along the way to prevent this in the future.

Scott Weiss stated that he has been involved in Kiwanis since 1988 and the people that he has met in this organization have a great respect for others and everyone is welcome. You don't have to be the greatest athlete or the best student, you just have to care about giving back to others.

Council Representative Sullivan explained that the Township is looking into the GoGov app which will send out push notifications about different events in town. She also stated that maybe the kids that don't feel included need someone who plays sports or is on Student Council, etc. to approach them to help them to feel included. She would also like to be included in mentoring a child and is interested in helping any way that she can with clubs, activities, clean ups, gardening, etc.

Maritza Gonzalez, Trinity United Methodist Church – explained that the church is more than willing to donate their property to have any meetings. They have a fellowship hall and a kitchen, and they host community dinners every three months and they are willing to help with whatever is needed. She stated that problems are always going to exist and we can talk about them all we want but if there is no action, there is always going to be a problem.

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ACTION

Council President Frappolli asked that the residents that are interested in volunteering share their contact information so a Youth Alliance Committee can be put together. Motion was made by Loftin, seconded by Fratinardo to create a Youth Alliance Committee.

Upon roll call, the Council voted as follows:

- YEAS: Fratinardo, Gabriele, Loftin, Sullivan, Frappolli
 - NOES: None
 - ABSENT: None
- Unanimous vote – Motion carried

Council President Frappolli asked members of Council if anyone would be interested in serving on the committee. Council Representatives Sullivan and Loftin agreed to serve on the committee.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Motion of Gabriele, seconded by Sullivan to open Public Comment. Voice vote – All ayes.

Seeing no one wishing to be heard, a Motion was made by Gabriele, seconded by Fratinardo to close the Public Comment portion. Voice vote – All ayes.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion of Loftin seconded by Gabriele to adjourn. Voice vote – All ayes. Meeting adjourned at 9:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Nancy L. Erlston, RMC
Township Clerk
/js