

**Florence Township Council Executive Session 05/12/21**

Florence, New Jersey  
May 12, 2021

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 electronically, in person attendance was not encouraged.

The meeting was called to order by Council President Garganio at 7:00 p.m. Council President Garganio led the Salute to the Flag.

The Opening Statement was read by the township deputy clerk: This meeting is being held in accordance with the provisions of the Open Public Meetings Act. Adequate notice was published in the Burlington County Times on January 10, 2021; placed on the Township website, and given to the Trenton Times for information.

**ROLL CALL OF MEMBERS**

Upon roll call the following were found to be present:

Present: Frank Baldorossi, Paul Ostrander, Jerry Sandusky, Dave Woolston, Bruce Garganio

Also Present: Mayor Craig H. Wilkie; Stephen Fazekas, Township Administrator; Kelly Grant, Township Solicitor; Nancy Erlston, Township Clerk (via Zoom); Jenise Silinsky, Deputy Township Clerk; Steven Matthews, Court Clerk

Absent: None

There was a brief moment of silence in honor of Peace Officer Appreciation Week, Police Officer Walter Kotch, and Firemen Pappy Brown and Chester Sutphin, all residents of the township who lost their lives in the line of duty. We would ordinarily have a service but due to Covid we were unable to.

**FIFTEEN (15) MINUTES OF PUBLIC COMMENT**

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

Seeing no one wishing to be heard, it was a Motion of Sandusky, seconded by Woolston to close the public comment portion.

**NEW BUSINESS**

- a. COVID Vaccines

Administrator Fazekas stated that there have been a lot of discussions regarding public employees and whether or not they need to be vaccinated. According to our solicitor it is something we do not have to mandate at this time and we will monitor and will make those decisions in the future if necessary.

Florence Township is going to become a Covid-19 testing facility at the old Public Works garage every Wednesday from 9:00am – 1:00pm. It will be a walk-up facility and the information is available on our website and the County Health Department website.

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Council President Garganio asked about the possibility of a vaccination site. Administrator Fazekas said that a request has been made to the County Health Department and when they do start mobile vaccinations sites we will be considered as one of the lead towns, due to our participation with the testing clinics in the past.

### b. Cannabis Legislation

Administrator Fazekas explained that with the State regulating Cannabis, all towns have until August 21<sup>st</sup> to “opt in” or “opt out” of this legislation. He provided Mayor and Council with correspondence that outlines all of the information. There is a clause in this legislation that the town can opt out for five years and then decide to opt in and you do not have to opt in to all of the different points in the cannabis legislation, you can pick and choose. He thought discussions should take place about this now rather than wait and make quick decisions and he would like to discuss it in more detail next month so that we can make a good decision on what best benefits the town.

He stated that he was in a JIF meeting and the JIF is also actively pursuing guidelines on how Cannabis legislation affects towns and they are looking to send information out to towns on that.

### c. Police Chief Boldizar Overview of Upcoming Events

Police Chief Boldizar talked about community events coming up this year. He said the DARE graduation will not be a formal graduation, the DARE officers will present certificates in the classrooms and give the kids their certificates along with t-shirts and coupons for a slice of pizza from one of the local pizzerias. Adopt a Cop will be held June 15<sup>th</sup> at the Roebing Elementary School and that involves the children who are involved with the Adopt a Cop program. The Bike Rodeo will be held on July 17 from 10:00am – 1:00pm in the rear of the municipal lot. The Emergency Services Youth Academy will be held again this year but depending on interest, they will break it down into two one-week courses; July 19 – July 23 and July 26 – July 30<sup>th</sup> from 9:00am – 1:00pm. They had a really good turnout in 2019 so he is hoping for a similar turnout this year. National Night Out will be a drive thru concept again this year on August 3 from 5:30pm – 8:30pm in the parking lot adjacent to the municipal building. By next year he is hoping that everyone in the community can come out.

## **OLD BUSINESS**

### a. Project Freedom

Mayor Wilkie shared a presentation of information provided by Project Freedom to include a rendition of what would be at Hornberger Avenue and Route 130 as part of Florence Township’s affordable housing obligation. Back in August of 1989 we had to deliver \$1,000,000 to Pemberton because we had agreed to provide 103 units to Pemberton. Back then you could do a transfer of development rights and we had until August 1<sup>st</sup> to pay them and if not, the agreement would have been gone. They would have received double the amount of money they were receiving from other towns but we got with them early enough to get a good deal. Fortunately, the administration back then, led by Mayor Benedetti, put a plan together that would provide affordable housing so we did not end up with a builder’s remedy. His plan included the 103 units to Pemberton, Roebing Arms which is a two-story building behind the library which houses people with disabilities but who also meet affordable housing guidelines, and the purchase of the Roebing Inn which was included in the affordable housing plan in 1989. We were also able to save the Duffy School in 2012 which is providing affordable housing and there are a couple of other locations throughout the community.

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There are a few ways a town can provide affordable housing; it can zone an area and provide affordable housing there. Or, and what some other communities may have done, is set aside 15-20% and end up with 1,000 units in order to get 200 or 150 or whatever the case may be with affordable. We have always tried to avoid that because, one of the things that comes with housing is children and education costs. The housing does not pay for children and it puts a burden on the school district which then puts a burden on the community. Many people criticize the idea of the warehouses but each of the warehouses in the township have probably contributed over \$500,000 in affordable housing fees. And we are using \$1,000,000+ of that to go toward Project Freedom which will provide 70 new units of affordable housing to protect Florence Township so we do not have to add 800 more homes if we were not to do this project.

Project Freedom is a 501c3 non-profit dedicated to empowering people with disabilities so that they can live independently through housing and related support services. They have a long-standing reputation for building quality communities which are maintained to the highest standards and have over 30 years of experience of developing and managing barrier free, fully accessible communities for persons with disabilities integrated within affordable housing communities.

Once the debt is paid off, the money goes back to continuing to maintain and invest in the facility. He shared photos of some of the other sites in Robbinsville, Westampton, Hopewell and Woodstown. He also showed an overview of what would be in Roebling at the intersection of Hornberger Avenue and Route 130. All are rental units and the range of income is between 30-60% of the medium. A family of 4 earning up to \$56,700 would qualify for housing in this facility. There will be 4 three-story L-shaped buildings with 18 units in each building and a standalone community center. Eighteen one-bedrooms, 36 two-bedrooms, 18 three-bedrooms and all will be energy efficient.

As far as the timeline, they will be making application in August and hopefully the announcement is made in December and they go on to Federal Home Bank in May and then funding rewards in October 2022. They are looking to start construction in February 2023 and have it completed in June of 2024. Last week the project was referred to the Planning Board and at the meeting they will be looking at a developer's agreement and then it will come back to Council for approval. Administrator Fazekas mentioned that the 72 units are going to give us 78 credits towards our affordable housing obligation.

Council President Garganio stated that it will be approximately 500 units of normal rate housing to make up for the COAH law. He said he thinks the town has done a great job moving things forward to protect it from some of the things that could happen if we didn't have this plan.

Mayor Wilkie shared that next week will be a public hearing on the fire district budget which was defeated and is now referred to Council and Councilman Garganio is reviewing it. By law there is to be a public hearing, which is set for next Wednesday and Council will make a decision on what the fire district's tax levy will be.

Council President Garganio stated that a letter was received from Whitesell requesting a meeting so he would like to sit down and try and set up a timeline that works. Maybe another Councilman would like to come on as well to see if we can move forward with the bypass. The letter did not give us a lot of hope but left the door open to have a conversation and we are going to see if there is a way to push this forward.

He also stated that we have put in a request to Burlington County to do a study on speed reduction along Delaware Avenue and Front Street. Administrator Fazekas stated that a response has not been received. There is a letter dated April 15, 2021 to Joe Brickley, the County Engineer but he has not heard back yet. Council also had concerns about the intersection of Delaware and Railroad Avenues and he and Mr.

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Brickley have made contact with NJDOT and they are currently setting up a meeting between transit, the county and the township to start looking into what can be done at that intersection.

Council President Garganio stated that one concern that has come up at a previous meeting is that when coming into town and making a left on to Railroad Avenue tractor trailers are stopping on the tracks waiting for the intersection to clear and there is a concern about safety with the train coming through. Chief Boldizar explained that they have spent some time with NJ Transit and they are aware of the issue as well.

**ACTION**

- A. Resolution 2021-99, Emergency Temporary Appropriation

Motion of Ostrander, seconded by Sandusky to approve Resolution No. 2021-99. Voice vote – all ayes.

Administrator Fazekas explained that we are currently working under a temporary budget. The budget was introduced last week and we are hoping for adoption June 2, 2021 but we are under state review this year. The state has said that it may take longer than June 2<sup>nd</sup> to get their approval on the budget. We have to operate under a temporary budget until the 2021 budget is adopted. You are only allowed to use 26.25% so when we start running short on some of those budgetary line items, we have to transfer funds from other budget line items so can continue to pay the bills. This resolution is just asking for temporary appropriations until the budget gets passed.

Upon roll call, Council voted as follows:

YEAS: Baldorossi, Ostrander, Sandusky, Woolston, Garganio  
NOES: None  
ABSENT: None Unanimous vote – Motion carried

- B. Resolution 2021-100, Approve Fireworks for Patriotic Day Celebration

Motion of Woolston, seconded by Baldorossi to approve Resolution No. 2021-100. Voice vote – all ayes.

Council President Garganio stated that the Chief’s report illustrates a lot of good things happening in town. Things are starting to get back to normal.

Upon roll call, Council voted as follows:

YEAS: Baldorossi, Ostrander, Sandusky, Woolston, Garganio  
NOES: None  
ABSENT: None Unanimous vote – Motion carried

Administrator Fazekas explained that Council will need a brief closed session for contracts. There will be no official action taken after.

**PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Council Vice President Ostrander opened the meeting up to the public at this time.

Alisa Paykos-Theurer, 117 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, asked how she could get information on the number of overdoses we have had in the township along with the number of arrests yearly for non-violet offenses or cannabis related offenses that may be decriminalized or going in that direction since 2000. And what is the town’s plan for expungements and will it be known to the community?

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Chief Boldizar explained to Ms. Paykos-Theurer that she needs to file an Opra Request for that information. He also explained that the Court is going through the expungements now and we are getting quite a few. We already have a process in place which is run by the attorney general's office.

Council President Garganio explained that as we work our way through these issues that those things would be put out there for the public. We are still in the fact-finding stages right now.

Ms. Paykos-Theurer also asked what other towns we are looking to for guidance, or what studies or assessments are being used?

Mayor Wilkie stated that the League of Municipalities had a number of issues while this was being developed so we will be looking for guidance there as well as from our JIF because there are legal challenges that will arise. All of the information that we will receive will be shared with Council to help them make a decision on the issue. Mayor Wilkie said that he wants it to be clear that this is not a money maker for the town. He sits on the executive board for the League of Municipalities and when this legislation was proposed a year and a half ago there was conversation of a 4-6% sales tax. There is actually only a 2% sales tax, so a business has to have a million dollars' worth of sales in order for Florence Township to receive \$20,000.

Council President Garganio stated that we will be reaching out to all of the neighboring communities to see what direction they are going and will take that into consideration as we go through the decision making process.

Talaya Loftin, 1005 West Fourth Street, asked if there is a plan or redevelopment plan for the walking trail and where it will end, across from where the garden is? Are there any plans for the open field there and would they be opposed to leaving it open and maybe have exercise stations for the residents and the kids could have an area to gather and play? And is there a plan to repave the intersection of Foundry and Bodine Streets?

Mayor Wilkie stated that there is nothing specific planned and that the engineer is looking at how some of that will be done. There is a parking issue as well, and they are working on a way to make parking advantageous for the residents there. From Eyre Street down to Front Street there is some ability to be a little more creative. Nothing has been finalized and any and all input is welcome and he asked her to please share any ideas she may have.

He also said he had some conversations with the administration about taking the RD Wood tot lot and expanding it. And, at one time there were discussions about a safety concern at the intersection of Bodine, West Third and Union Streets. He explained that the whole section there will be looked at as one project to include any repaving.

Administrator Fazekas explained that the walking path will not end where it seems to end now and that it will continue through IPT West, which is on the Griffin Pipe side, along the river from Front Street and have a scenic overlook. The goal is to have that path continue all the way down the river.

Ms. Loftin also asked if there is any plan for community engagement with the police for the areas where it may not always be welcome.

Mayor Wilkie stated that there are a number of police activities that are community engagements that Chief Boldizar went over earlier in the meeting.

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Rachel Lester, 113 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue, stated that she volunteers at Flash Forward Community and they just recently did a clean up in Roebing along Amboy and Railroad Avenues and she was wondering what would need to be done to get a crossing path from where the neighborhood is to the store on Hornberger Avenue. There were a lot of kids trying to get to the store and she is asking for a speed bump or crosswalk/sign to slow the traffic down so the residents and kids can safely cross there.

Administrator Fazekas stated that it can be looked into with the road projects.

She also wanted to voice her opinion on the recreational marijuana facility. She said that there are more than several veterans that reside in the township and her husband is a US Marine who suffers from PTSD and she is hoping that these veterans are taken into consideration when a decision is made. Her husband has to travel to get his medical marijuana and, because she resides here, she would like to give Florence Township her money and not the surrounding towns.

Partiba, 30 Belmont Circle, has investors interested in applying for a recreational marijuana facility and asked if Florence Township is considering opening when the Governor releases the applications.

Council President Garganio explained that we are in the process within the next month or so of making a final decision but it is being considered at this time.

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

Motion of Sandusky, seconded by Woolston to adjourn to Closed Session at 7:44 p.m. where no action will be taken. Voice vote – all ayes.

**ADJOURNMENT**

Motion of Woolston, seconded by Sandusky to adjourn. Voice vote – all ayes. Meeting adjourned at 7:47 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Nancy L. Erlston, RMC  
Township Clerk  
/js