

Florence Township Council Regular Session 2/15/23

Florence, New Jersey
February 15, 2023

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.

The Opening Statement was read by the Township Clerk: Notice was posted on the municipal bulletin board on January 8, 2023; published in the Burlington County Times on January 8, 2023, placed on the Township website and given to the Trenton Times for information on January 10, 2023.

ROLL CALL OF MEMBERS

Upon roll call the following were found to be present:

Present: Frank Baldorossi, Bruce Garganio, Nicholas Haas, Kristin Marter, Paul Ostrander

Also Present: Mayor Craig H. Wilkie; Stephen Fazekas, Township Administrator; Thomas J. Hastie, Jr., Esq., Township Solicitor; Nancy L. Erlston, Township Clerk; Jenise Silinsky, Deputy Township Clerk

Absent: None

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- Regular Session of February 1, 2023
- Closed Session of February 1, 2023

Motion of Ostrander, seconded by Baldorossi to approve the minutes as submitted. Voice vote – All ayes.

Upon roll call, Council voted as follows:

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

FINANCIAL CORRESPONDENCE

Motion of Haas, seconded by Marter to approve the following correspondence.

- Township Clerk’s Monthly Report for January 2023
- Court Administrator’s Monthly Report for January 2023
- Tax Collector’s Monthly Tax Report for January 2023
- Treasurer’s Bill List

Florence Township Council Regular Session 2/15/23

Upon roll call, Council voted as follows:

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

REGULAR CORRESPONDENCE

- A. Letter from Martin Eckert, Jr., Recreation Director, regarding Nathan Pagano’s Eagle Scout Project

Motion of Ostrander, seconded by Marter to approve the correspondence.

Upon roll call, Council voted as follows:

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

APPLICATIONS

None at this time.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Council President Garganio opened the meeting to the public at this time. Seeing no one wishing to be heard, it was the Motion of Ostrander, seconded by Marter to close the public portion of the meeting. Voice vote – All ayes.

RESOLUTIONS

None at this time.

ORDINANCES

**ORDINANCE NO. 2023-01
Amending the Salary Schedule for the Township of Florence and
Implementing the Collective Bargaining Agreement between the
Township of Florence and the Communication Workers of America (CWA)
(2nd Read, Public Hearing & Adopt)**

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 Ostrander, seconded by Haas to close the public portion of the meeting. Voice vote – All ayes.

Motion of Baldorossi, seconded by Marter to approve Ordinance No. 2023-01.

Upon roll call, Council voted as follows:

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

Florence Township Council Regular Session 2/15/23

**ORDINANCE NO. 2023-02
Providing for the Creation and Certification of a New Township Tax Map
and GIS Mapping of the Township's Stormwater Conveyance System
(2nd Read, Public Hearing & Adopt)**

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 Ostrander, seconded by Haas to close the public portion of the meeting. Voice vote – All ayes.

Motion of Marter, seconded by Haas to approve Ordinance No. 2023-02.

Upon roll call, Council voted as follows:

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

**ORDINANCE NO. 2023-03
Bond Ordinance for Park Improvements Including
Wilkie Park Tennis Courts, Water Works Park Playground and
Roebing Park Fishing Pier
(2nd Read, Public Hearing & Adopt)**

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

Don Kamienski, 10 McCay Drive, asked if the pier planned for the Roebing Park is meant for fishing or for catching and if it is for catching he suggests that some local residents be asked for assistance to determine the location of the pier.

Talaya Loftin, 1005 West Fourth Street, asked which park playground the ordinance is in reference to? She also asked if there are plans for any other parks in the township such as Railroad Avenue and the RD Wood Tot Lot and what the amount for the upgrade will be? Mayor Wilkie explained that this ordinance is to modernize the equipment at the Waterworks Park off of West Sixth Street. He stated that all of the parks need to be replaced/repared because they are all over 12 years old but the Waterworks Park is the oldest park playground and it needs to be brought up to ADA standards to make it handicapped accessible. He stated that upgrades to other parks in the Township will fall under the assessment that the Park Planner is going to explain later in the meeting and, out of the Master Plan that the Planner puts together, it will identify the other parks that will be upgraded in the future. \$600,000 will go towards the new Waterworks playground.

Ms. Loftin also asked if there are any plans to remedy Wilkie Park where a tree fell and part of the railing is missing/broken. Mayor Wilkie stated that he was not aware of the damage at the park and asked her to reach out to the administrative offices.

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

Motion of Baldorossi, seconded by Haas to approve Ordinance No. 2023-03.

Florence Township Council Regular Session 2/15/23

Upon roll call, Council voted as follows:

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

REPORTS OF COMMITTEES, BOARDS AND OFFICERS

Council Representative Marter asked to revisit the website stating that it has been two years and there does not seem to be any obvious improvements. She feels we really need to focus on this website to be able to get information to people that need it and it will make it easier for all involved. She also again requested that comments be allowed on the Township Facebook page because they were allowed for as long as that page was set up and she feels that we are doing a great disservice to our community by not listening and shutting the public out.

Council Representative Haas gave an update on the first Economic Development Committee meeting on February 7th. They are looking at setting up a meet and greet with some County and State organizations to assist with helping small businesses in town with loans/financing sometime in late spring or early summer. He will keep Council updated going in to the future.

REPORTS: ADMINISTRATION

Mayor

Mayor Wilkie stated that on Monday, February 20th Boyd's Pharmacy will be celebrating it's 100th year with an Open House and at 12:00 p.m. he will be presenting them with a Proclamation. They have activities planned all day and they would love the attendance. As he shared previously, Clark and Carol Boyd will be the Grand Marshals in the Patriotic Day celebration in July and Boyd's Pharmacy is planning an activity sometime in September which may include a street fair or something along those lines.

Mayor Wilkie also shared that the Fire District Election will be held on Saturday, February 18th from 2-9 p.m. at the Firehouse and that this is the last Council meeting until March 1st.

Administrator

Administrator Fazekas spoke about the Community Center rental pricing and contract and asked for Council's approval. Mayor and Council discussed the proposed hall rental agreement and Council agreed that tax-exempt groups would only pay the \$125 clean up fee. Council agreed with the rest of the contract as written.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None at this time.

NEW BUSINESS

A. Recreational Needs Assessment Survey Reports

Steve Lennon of Taylor Design Group was in attendance to speak about the Needs Assessment Survey. He stated that Council is looking to make investments into the township's recreation facilities and to help guide those investments an assessment was done to evaluate what the public thought would be a good place to start. The Recreational Needs Assessment was created and posted for about a month between October and November of 2022 and 199 responses were received. The questions asked were in five sections; 1 dealt with usage and what parks were utilized most and then sort of ranking those facilities.

Florence Township Council Regular Session 2/15/23

The second one was evaluating each of the facilities and whether it was amenities or the overall facility itself. The third section was recreational needs, what did the Township need to provide more or maybe even less of. There was also a demographics section to get an understanding of who is using the parks and who is responding to the assessment. Then we asked open ended questions, thoughts and comments. This gave people a chance to give different feedback.

The results were pretty positive and there are no significant deficiencies. Most of the recreational needs of the township are being met and the parks are well used and highly valued by the residents. New facilities that were mentioned quite a bit were a spray ground or a pool, fitness stations, indoor recreational, pickle ball and trails. Amenities that people were interested in were more restrooms, lighting, picnic tables, benches, trash receptacles and landscaping.

Also in the survey, residents were asked to evaluate operations in terms of how things are being maintained and programs being offered. Not surprisingly, most would like to see increased maintenance, cleanliness and more program offerings. Veteran's/Waterworks Park, Roebing Park and Wilkie/River's Edge were ranked the highest, with the lowest ranking parks being Railroad Avenue and RD Wood. The NJDEP is requiring public input now so if you want to get grants to fund some of these improvement projects, this is a prerequisite and you are already ahead of the curve on that. It is not to say that you can't do this more frequently or as other needs surface, but overall, it is a worthwhile effort.

Mr. Lennon stated that, as mentioned with the bond ordinance, there is plenty that needs to happen with regards to the existing playground at Waterworks Park, that facility is in pretty bad shape. The safety surface has been repaired numerous times and the entire facility is not ADA accessible or even compliant. It is not about just adding play but getting the basics of accessibility and getting the township up to code as you roll through this is paramount.

Mayor Wilkie stated in addition to expanding and making the Waterworks playground bigger, it is going to take in more ages as well as those with special needs. This will move forward every year in different parks throughout the township

Regarding the demographic questions, Steven Lennon mentioned that one of the questions asked was if there was anyone in the household that was disabled as defined by the ADA and 15% of the respondents answered that with a yes. That is a pretty significant number and by law we should be addressing those needs and he plans to attend a Recreation Committee meeting to discuss this.

Council President Garganio asked if there will be a review of all of our parks moving forward as well as a priority list of how they should be addressed because of a need? Mr. Lennon said that we can work together to prioritize and develop a plan for the years to come. Some of this may be determined by funding. Once we outline some of this, Green Acres grants, eligible funds for specific needs like accessible playgrounds, etc. that target certain things and, if you already have a plan worked out, then you can go after that grant funding.

Mr. Lennon explained that one thing that Green Acres used to allow was compiling a bunch of different projects at different sites but they no longer allow that, which makes it tough. Sometimes you need to have a significant enough of a project to qualify for the grant.

Florence Township Council Regular Session 2/15/23

This needs assessment is letting us know where the residents stand and evaluate how the township is doing globally. We evaluate this information and we decide the where the priorities are. Mr. Lennon stated that he would be attending a meeting with the Recreation Committee in March and working on developing plans for the playground and for the tennis courts at Wilkie Park. One of the other things that was interesting here, not everyone wants active recreation. Trails and things of that nature showed up in this as well in terms of needs.

Council President Garganio stated that there is a parcel of land that the Township owns on Bustleton Road and it goes back a long way but there is no access to it. He said it might be something worth looking at because it might be an area to cut paths through and have a low maintenance township park that gets you out into that type of an area.

Council Representative Kristan Marter asked if there is any more word on the path that is supposed to go along the river? Mayor Wilkie stated that Administrator Fazekas spoke with the engineer and they are making contact to find out where that stands. He is thinking it probably has to be cleaned up to higher standard than what the business is. His guess is that all of the property has the same amount of contamination but because you are going to be able to walk on it they may have to do something different there. They are waiting from the engineer on what the status is on that.

Council President Garganio stated that we do have the easement for that walking path along the river behind that building. The thought process was if we can tie in the money from the County on the Heritage Trail, that would possibly be 2,000 feet of river frontage. If you can get that amount of river frontage, it is worth investing a little bit of money in with some overlooks and things like that. It would be a nice spot back in there.

Mr. Lennon stated that they are going to be reaching out to the county to try and coordinate those efforts. The county has been pretty successful with getting grant funding federally so they would be very interested potentially in connecting and, at the very least, we should be thinking about not duplicating efforts or causing a conflict between the two trail systems. Mr. Lennon said that doesn't know how high of a priority it is for the county for this segment but at least having those conversations and knowing the township is ready and are willing to participate, it could go a long way.

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.

Bryan Hewitt, 1080 Grove Street, said that he is having a problem with the website as well, stating that the search engine is bad and another big issue he noticed is that the archive website was live at some point and it was available to anyone so sometimes when he searches, he actually gets the old Florence website. What that is doing is that when people look for meetings and information, they are sometimes getting archived versions of it. Over time this will de-rank the new website and these searches may not produce new results at all at some point.

Florence Township Council Regular Session 2/15/23

Mr. Hewitt agreed with Councilwoman Marter regarding the Township Facebook page. He stated that this is a working-class town and not everyone has time after work to attend a public meeting and it is an avenue for people to communicate and discuss issues they may have. He said that there are management applications that are fairly inexpensive and that Facebook management tools are not the best. There are tools out there that will basically congregate all of the comments and information and you can easily read over everything all at once and it makes it easier for anyone looking at them.

Mr. Hewitt asked about the process for vetting people that are allowed to take tours of the mill site. One of the companies that toured the mill site was Veridian Partners LLC who specifically develops warehouses. He was wondering why they were allowed to tour that site. Mayor Wilkie explained that anyone who asked to tour was part of the RFP process and access is not restricted in the RFP process.

Mr. Hewitt stated that some of the areas that had been remediated had more intense contamination back in 2003 than what is sitting there now so one can make the general assumption that roughly half has been cleaned up. President Garganio stated that if it is done by a private contractor, they can do it better than the Federal Government does. The EPA has pledged that if a developer does come in and wants to do some of that clean up, they are willing to negotiate part of that financial burden because it will take some of the pressure off of them. But it is going to take the right person to do that with.

Mayor Wilkie stated that everything that is within the fenced area has to be capped.

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

ENTER INTO CLOSED SESSION

Resolution 2023-57 Resolution Authorizing the Mayor, Township Council and Support Staff to meet on Closed Session and Authorizing the Exclusion of the Public from that Portion of the Meeting Dealing with Specific Issues Requiring Non-Public Discussions:

Attorney Client Privilege – Roebing Steel Plant

Contract Negotiations – 700 Railroad Avenue

It was a Motion of Haas, seconded by Marter to adjourn to Closed Session at 7:59 p.m. where no action will be taken. Voice vote – All ayes.

ADJOURNMENT

Council returned to the Regular meeting at 8:19 p.m. on a Motion by Haas, seconded by Marter. Voice Vote – All Ayes. No action was taken. 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
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