

Florence Township Council Regular Session 5/17/23

Florence, New Jersey
May 17, 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, Nicholas Haas, Kristin Marter, Paul Ostrander, Bruce Garganio

Also Present: Mayor Craig H. Wilkie; Thomas J. Hastie, Jr., Esq., Township Solicitor; Nancy L. Erlston, Acting Administrator/Township Clerk; Jenise Silinsky, Deputy Township Clerk; Ted Lovenduski, Administrative Assistant

Absent: None

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- Regular Session from May 3, 2023

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

FINANCIAL CORRESPONDENCE

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

- Tax Collector’s Monthly Repot for April 2023
- Court Administrator’s Monthly Report for April 2023
- Township Clerk’s Monthly Report for April 2023
- Water/Sewer Monthly Report for April 2023

Upon roll call, Council voted as follows:

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

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Motion of Ostrander, seconded by Haas to approve the Treasurer's Bill List.

Upon roll call, Council voted as follows:

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

REGULAR CORRSPONDENCE

- Letter from Burlington County Regarding Community Development Block Grant Program FY2023 Annual Plan

Motion of Ostrander, seconded by Haas to receive and file the correspondence. Voice vote – All ayes.

APPLICATIONS

- A. Social Affair Permit, Florence Twp. Football Association Annual Bocce Ball Tournament American Legion Post 194, 601 Broad St., Florence, NJ 08518 on August 5, 2023 9am-9pm (Rain Date August 6, 2023 9am-9pm)

Motion of Baldorossi, seconded by Marter to approve the application.

Upon roll call, Council voted as follows:

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

PUBLIC HEARING AND ADOPTION OF 2023 MUNICIPAL BUDGET

Council President Garganio opened the Public Hearing of the 2023 Municipal Budget up to the public. Seeing no one wishing to be heard, it was a Motion of Ostrander, seconded by Haas to close the public hearing. Voice vote – All ayes.

PUBLIC COMMENT

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

Pastor Terrence West, 312 Foundry Street, the Assistant Pastor to Pastor Moore of On the Wings of Love Church, stated that the house next door to him at 306 Foundry Street had been torn down for years and it is an empty lot. The grass is overgrown and nothing has been done with the sidewalk there for over 9 years. It has become a safety hazard with no sidewalk and asked to have that fixed. He also said that the overgrown grass and weeds have broken his fence on that side of his yard

Mayor Wilkie stated that Council is going to be approving the bond ordinance tonight to put the money in place for a road program and also for the bike path that we have been talking about and there is going to be a connection right by his house on Foundry Street because of that empty lot next door. There will then either be concrete or pavement that will connect the sidewalk over to that path and that will be addressed sometime this year.

He also asked if there is a way to slow down delivery drivers on West Fifth Street and for a dog waste bag receptacle along the bike path. He stated that he purchased bags from Amazon himself and he has been giving out bags so he is asking for one along that path.

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

RESOLUTIONS

RESOLUTION NO. 2023-105

**Approve Request Release of Performance Letter of Credit – Forge Mill by Lennar
Florence-Columbus Rd & Regars Dr.**

RESOLUTION NO. 2023-106

**Approving a Project Labor Agreement by the Township Related to
The Undertaking of Future Redevelopment Project(s)
on Block 139, Lots 1, 2, & 3**

Motion of Baldorossi, seconded by Marter to approve Resolution Nos. 2023-105 and 2023-106.

Upon roll call, Council voted as follows:

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

RESOLUTION NO. 2023-107

To Read Budget by Title Only

Motion of Ostrander, seconded by Haas to approve Resolution No. 2023-107.

Upon roll call, Council voted as follows:

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

RESOLUTION NO. 2023-108

Amending the 2023 Introduced Budget

Motion of Ostrander, seconded by Haas to approve Resolution No. 2023-108.

Upon roll call, Council voted as follows:

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

RESOLUTION NO. 2023-109

Adopt Municipal Budget

Motion of Ostrander, seconded by Haas to approve Resolution No. 2023-109.

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Upon roll call, Council voted as follows:

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

ORDINANCES

ORDINANCE NO. 2023-12

Providing for Improvements to Township Roads, Streets and Bike Paths in and for the Township, Appropriating \$2,100,000 Therefor, and Authorizing the Issuance of \$1,995,000 in General Improvement Bonds or Notes of the Township to Finance the Same (2nd Reading, Public Hearing and Adoption)

Council President Garganio opened the public hearing up. Seeing no one wishing to be heard, it was a Motion of Ostrander, seconded by Haas to close the public comment portion. Voice vote – All ayes.

Motion of Haas, seconded by Marter to approve Ordinance No. 2023-12.

Upon roll call, Council voted as follows:

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

ORDINANCE NO. 2023-13

Authorizing the Acquisition of Real Property Known as Block 126.02, Lot 1.01 for Future Affordable Housing Project (2nd Reading, Public Hearing and Adoption)

Council President Garganio opened the public hearing.

Kristin Mustillo, 132 6th Avenue, stated that, as an avid user of public parks and trail systems, the lower Roebing riverfront park was a large factor in her decision to purchase a home here in 2021. She has spent a lot of time on the D&R Canal which is what she sees the Heritage Trail having the potential to become. She asked Council, as they are considering Ordinance Nos. 2023-13 and 2023-14 regarding the purchase of the former VFW site at 10th and Main, to examine whether and how the Township can use this opportunity to provide more than one public benefit at the same time. She understands that the purchase of this land is for a larger plan for affordable housing and is going to be for lots 5, 6 & 7, which is the property that fronts Hornberger Avenue from the IGA all the way to the small commercial building on the corner of 10th Avenue and that those blocks and lots were recently rezoned for high density affordable housing. She stated that her comments are not about affordable housing and she does not so much care what the property is used for but she does care about public access to the lower Roebing riverfront park, increasing recreational amenities and connecting and building up corridors in our community and using and implementing smart planning principles in order to do that.

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In her opinion, there is not great public access to the park making it hard to get to, the path doesn't make sense because it's not well connected and, you could never have a meaningful amount of people down there for a community event. The way she sees it, Hornberger Avenue provides two opportunities to increase public access to that park. One would be coming off of Route 130 by the museum. The other opportunity is the property being discussed in this ordinance. There are three lots along Hornberger Avenue adjacent to the VFW, not necessarily on the agenda this evening, but all a part of the same larger plan. She thinks whatever is done there, some thought should go towards how to provide access off of the main road back to the park and what types of recreational amenities we can provide and how to connect our neighborhood corridors.

Ms. Mustillo stated that some benefits may include access off of a main road rather than a small amount of parking spots off of the avenues and taking traffic off of the back avenues. Perhaps a parking lot could be included on this property and you could have more activities like waterfront concerts or fireworks over the Delaware. If houses are being built and water and sewer is being put in, maybe restrooms could be added so people can have access as they are running or cycling miles on the Heritage Trail. And maybe even extend the Heritage Trail so it has a clean connection and does not have to go through the streets.

If you can create these opportunities, you would attract people to the park and also create community connections. She is asking Council not to do anything that restricts us from providing more than one public benefit at the same time. In her opinion, this property is a key property and could be used for multiple purposes. Affordable housing is a public benefit and public access and recreation is also a public benefit. They are not mutually exclusive public benefits; we can have both together. She is asking council to explore this and maybe table these ordinances to look into the funding sources. Her concern is if a decision tonight binds us into something that makes this inflexible.

Council Representative Marter asked if the purchase of this property limits us to not be able to put things like paths through that property in order to access other parts of the park. Whatever we do to the property for affordable housing, can we make it contingent upon that property that we still have some sort of access or right away if there is a way to be able to easily get a path through there?

Council President Garganio stated that he does not believe that the property being discussed in this ordinance is that property. There was talk about connecting the Roebing Park into Riverbank Drive and that piece of property is already owned by the town. We own, in essence, from Main Street to the river. This is picking up this piece of property and, if for some reason we chose not to utilize this property for affordable housing we would have to refund the affordable housing dollar-for-dollar. At this point this would lock it but it doesn't lock it into anything that we tie strictly to affordable housing if there was a change in the future. But we do need to lock this in because if we don't purchase it, it leaves it open to anyone to purchase and do whatever they want there. He agreed that finding access to that back lot going through whatever type of housing goes in there is a great idea and should not be hard to design.

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

Motion of Ostrander, seconded by Haas to approve Ordinance No. 2023-13.

Upon roll call, Council voted as follows:

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

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ORDINANCE NO. 2023-14

**Providing for the Acquisition of 100 Main Street in and for the Township, Appropriating \$500,000 Therefor, and Authorizing the Issuance of \$475,000 in General Improvement Bonds or Notes of the Township to Finance the Same
(2nd Reading, Public Hearing and Adoption)**

Council President Garganio opened the public hearing. Seeing no one wishing to be heard, it was a Motion of Ostrander, seconded by Haas to close the public comment portion. Voice vote – All ayes.

Motion of Ostrander, seconded by Haas to approve Ordinance No. 2023-14.

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 stated that Mr. Floyd had reached out to her about having signage added in the parks regarding the restriction of marijuana use. Ted Lovenduski explained that there is a sign in the parking lot at Wilkie Park that states that there is no marijuana use in the park. Mayor Wilkie further explained that, as part of the renovations, new signs are being planned there and in all of the parks.

Council Representative Marter apologized to Mayor Wilkie stating that it sounded like she was blaming him for the splash park at the last meeting and she was not blaming him specifically. It was concluded in a meeting in July of 2022 that the splash park would be turned over to the engineer’s office to find another location. She is taking responsibility for not following up with the Mayor stating that everyone in the town has four representatives that they elect and they dropped the ball. There was no follow up and so it just dropped and we moved on to fixing up the Water Works Park, adding a new fishing pier and we kind of walked away from it instead of looking for another location. Ms. Loftin had made some suggestions at the last meeting, one being Woodlawn Avenue. There is also possibly of the RD Wood field and Wilkie Park. She thinks we need to listen to what the people are saying and look for a place to put this and how to do it.

Council Representative Marter stated that she rode over to the Railroad Avenue Park and there is hardly any equipment there at all, they had just taken the broken slide away. There is nothing broken at the Water Works Park. It seems like we are focusing on the same areas and we keep walking away from the areas that seem like they need something for activities for the kids or they need something to be repaired or renewed or renovated in their neighborhoods.

Mayor Wilkie explained that we have not walked away from the splash park. He had been discussing that internally to find out how feasible it is and felt it should be in a neighborhood where folks could not have pools to try to help them and be supportive of our children. The professionals, as well as the results from the survey of the residents indicated that the Marconi triangle was not the best location. At that time he also suggested we bring in a park planner. We had managed our parks internally in our own way up to that point. He was frustrated at how some had been maintained and last year the park planner was brought in to evaluate Water Works and Veterans parks, our largest parks, and he had been looking for a comprehensive playground. Our playgrounds right now are geared towards one age group, ages 5 to 12 maybe, but there is nothing there for the young. And he had a resident back in 2017 express concerns that

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our parks are not for those children with disabilities or for runners, the children who like to run. The park at Water Works had a fence along Sixth Street for many years and a decision was made internally to take it down and that had residents expressing concerns for safety. The Rec Committee then decided that a fence is needed around the playground. He then decided that a planner was needed.

The Water Works playground is 20+ years old and one of the problems we have throughout the town right now is that just about all of the playground equipment is about 20 years or more old and we have difficulty getting supplies. In fact, one of the plans right now is that when this playground gets dismantled to put the new one in, some of those parts will go in to some of our other parks where the equipment has damage. In speaking with the planner today he stated that one of his staff members has been through all of the parks and is now putting a needs assessment together based on the survey questionnaire as well as the conditions that he is finding that will show what needs immediate replacement and/or what can last for a couple of years.

The splash park is something that should be decided after you have evaluated all of your parks, then you choose a location and put a bond ordinance in place to do so. You also have to figure out how you are going to maintain it. You can either recycle the water so you would need an operator to make sure it keeps clean, or you allow it go off into the drains. If someone wants to do a little more work then you can research and pursue it. He brought it up as an opportunity it doesn't mean it's not going to happen. With public money, we have to do our due diligence before we spend it and some things take longer than others.

Council Representative Marter stated that she remembers we were looking at a longer fishing pier that went far out and then a shorter one and a lot of the residents have some concern about the channel. She asked about the length of the pier and if it is the NJDEP or the EPA that will be involved with this and how long will it typically take to get processed?

Mayor Wilkie stated that this is the next phase. The engineer was familiar with this as well as the planner and what they provided should get approved but it will take time. He also explained that the location was chosen because a fisherman was brought in and, with the comments from the engineers, they said the point wasn't as deep and you weren't going to get as many fish so the location was moved. Ted Lovenduski stated that the permitting process should be completed by the end of this year but that some of the materials have to be ordered earlier because of the lead time on materials. The engineers are hoping that this gets in sometime before next spring but a lot of it depends on the availability of materials and the NJDEP.

Council Representative Marter asked about the basketball court in Woodlawn Park and the chain link fence right up behind each of the poles and asked if these could be moved back. Council agreed to have someone take a look at that to see what can be done there. She also asked about the bricks on Main Street and Ted Lovenduski explained that the Public Works Department had started work on those today.

Council Vice President Haas explained that the Economic Committee held its first local business networking breakfast on Monday, May 15th. About a dozen residents attended and about 5 businesses were represented. Council Representative Marter and Mayor Wilkie were both in attendance as well. Overall, there was a positive reaction and the information provided was beneficial to most. They are planning to hold another one in the fall.

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Council Vice President Haas also wanted to highlight the boy's baseball team for winning the Patriot Division. As well as Siniva Sufia on her 100th hit in softball as a junior and Gabby Loftin who broke the high school record for javelin with a throw of 112 feet and 8 inches. This is her first time ever throwing and she is currently ranked #1 in Central Jersey Group 1 and 25th in the state overall and he wished her luck in the States.

REPORTS: ADMINISTRATION

Mayor

Mayor Wilkie stated that this is the last Council meeting until June 7th and there are a lot of activities going on between now and then. On May 18th there is a tennis and music event happening at Wilkie Park from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. There are plans being put in place with other organizations to do activities in June, July and August. This is Police Awareness Week and Friday, May 19th at 10:00 a.m. the FOP will be holding a memorial in front of the municipal building for Walter Kotch who was killed in action on April 15, 1965.

American Legion Post 194 will host their Memorial Day services on Sunday May 28th around 10:00 a.m. and then visit all of the cemeteries throughout the community and 2 or 3 of the veteran monuments. The American Legion Post #39 on Fourth Avenue in Roebing will host their service at 10:00 a.m. and then visit the memorials and cemeteries in the Village of Roebing.

The carnival is returning to the township for the first time since 2019. It starts Wednesday, May 31st until Saturday, June 3rd. Signs will be posted. Early tickets sales are available through the school and will also be available at the Municipal Building.

Administrator

Acting Administrator Erlston stated that the Township's three-year membership with the Burlington County Municipal Joint Insurance Fund (JIF) is up for renewal effective January of 2024. The JIF would like to attend an upcoming Council meeting. They are looking at Wednesday, July 12th to come in via Zoom or in person, if we prefer, and give an update of what they do and the benefits of the JIF before we do our renewal. Council agreed to have them attend in person on July 12th.

Division of Law

Township Solicitor Tom Hastie explained that at the first meeting in June he is going to need a Closed Session to discuss litigation regarding PFOAs.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Council Representative Garganio stated that his opinion on the splash park is that it belongs at the Water Works Park because there is parking and the ability for people to come to it. If you put it into a little spot anywhere in the town you are going to have vehicles going there and no parking available. Right here you have the facilities, the lights, and the most activity with sports. In his opinion, we should get some sort of recommendation from the park planner as to where it would make the most sense to put it. In the meantime, he thinks we probably could have our park planner just give us some general numbers. He doesn't know what the difference is in the recycling system for the water compared to just letting it pour everywhere which, anything that he has ever seen, they want everything under control. Ultimately, he thinks it will have to be a recycled system. Before we can make a decision, we need to know what those dollar amounts are going to be or at least a rough estimate. He is suggesting we ask the park planner to give us that information. If Council decides it can fit into next year's budget, it is just a matter of plugging it in. He thinks that we need to focus first on Railroad Avenue to get that up and running again.

NEW BUSINESS

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None at this time.

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, stated that it would probably be helpful to get a list of places where the splash park can go. He stated that everyone he spoke with, their primary concern was having a park in the original location, and what everyone liked about the idea of that location was that their kids could walk to it and it wouldn't be very far away. Is there opposition to locating it in Wilkie Park, is it not able to go there or are there other locations closer to where it was previously going to be? And is there an estimate on time as to when that will get done?

Council Representative Garganio stated that he thinks it would be a matter of if there is a better location that makes more sense then we can have that conversation. He is leaning toward the Water Works Park because of the centralized location and it would get a lot more use because of the numbers that we have. He thinks that the decision could be made by just taking a look at the report that we get back and put it in the best location. Mayor Wilkie stated that it will get done sometime this year.

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.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion of Marter seconded by Haas to adjourn. Voice vote – All ayes. Meeting adjourned at 8:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Nancy L. Erlston, RMC
Township Clerk
/js