

Florence Township Council Regular Session 9/6/23

Florence, New Jersey
September 6, 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, Kristan Marter, Paul Ostrander, Bruce Garganio

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

Absent: None

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- Regular Meeting of July 12, 2023
- Regular Meeting of August 2, 2023
- Regular Meeting of August 9, 2023

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

FINANCIAL CORRESPONDENCE

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

- Tax Collector's Monthly Tax Report and Water & Sewer Report for July 2023
- CFO's Monthly Cash Reports and Budget Reports for July 2023
- Treasurer's Bill List

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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

REGULAR CORRSPONDENCE

- A. Affidavit of Tax Bill Mailing
- B. Florence Township Police Department Monthly Report for July 2023
- C. Letter from Roebling Historical Society regarding Dedication of Tree and Memorial Plack for George Lengel on September 17, 2023 at 12:30pm.
- D. Letter from Judy King requesting use of the Third Street Firehouse on Saturday, September 23, 2023 from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. for the Florence Historical Society Open House.

Motion of Ostrander, seconded by Baldorossi to receive and file the correspondence.

Upon roll call, Council voted as follows:

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

APPLICATIONS

- A. Application for Project Freedom Street Names, Street A to be known as “Freedom Boulevard” Street B to be known as “Larson Lane.”
- B. Purse Bingo, On-Premise 50/50 Raffle and On-Premise Merchandise Raffle on February 10, 2024 from 6:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m. for the Riverbank Charter School, 1300 Hornberger Avenue, Roebling

Motion of Marter, seconded by Haas to approve the applications.

Council President Garganio asked for clarification on the street names. Mayor Wilkie explained that he recommended that they pull a name from the VFW or the Legion because both are no longer in existence and the Larson name was recommended because they were two brothers who were killed in action. Council President Garganio requested a copy of the list of names that we pull from and Clerk Erlston agreed to share that with Council.

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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PUBLIC COMMENT

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

Patty DiMassa, 1039 Cedar Lane, followed up on the path lighting issue she brought up to Council on June 21, 2023. Mayor Wilkie explained that PSE&G made us aware that we are not permitted to touch those lights and if we were to turn them off then we would become liable for anything that would happen there. PSE&G stated that turning the lights off would cost the township \$20,000 and we already spent \$70,000+ to have the lights installed. PSE&G offered a different style light that may be a lower wattage to have less impact in that area but they are still insisting on the \$20,000 payment in order to make those changes. He stated that until we can come to some type of agreement with PS&G the lights are going to stay on. The goal is to get PSE&G to put in a lower wattage fixture to reduce the amount of light spillage on the DiMassa property.

Administrator Muchowski explained that he is the point person on this and it is on his list to see what the options are. He explained that as it stands there are only a few options with the existing light posts as there are only a few compatible fixtures available. He said he would follow up with PSE&G to clarify our options.

James Fevola, 39 Ridgway Drive, stated that he has noticed a significant increase in the truck traffic on Old York Road. He attended Zoning Board meetings in the past and they told him it was a county issue. The issue that he has as a resident is that it is a dangerous situation stating that they come down off of the Turnpike extension overpass at excessive speeds and they do engine braking sometimes at night and it becomes a quality-of-life destroyer for anyone living on or directly off of Old York Road between the safety and the noise. There have also been tractors without trailers driving around his neighborhood twice in the last three months, they were likely lost. He wrote to the County Board of Commissioners based on a recommendation of the Zoning Board but never heard anything back. He sent a second email asking for an update but has not heard anything since then either.

Mayor Wilkie asked Mr. Fevola to forward the correspondence to him so he could follow up. He stated that the County was putting together a type of truck task force and it was supposed to have representatives from Burlington City, Burlington Township, Florence and possibly Bordentown and Mansfield and the County has been trying to get some meetings together to talk about this as a global situation because those vehicles have been spreading. He stated that he will forward the emails to the County Engineer to find out what happened.

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.

Township Auditor Review Annual Audit

Township Auditor Michael Holt of Holt, McNally and Associates, gave an overview of the December 31, 2022 Audit and stated that the results are very good. All of the assets, liabilities, fund balances and notes disclosures, revenues and expenditures are fairly stated as of December

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31, 2022. He is happy to report that there are no findings this year. Last year there was one but that has been cleaned up and this year's Audit is very clean.

The current fund is in good shape, cash is up about \$1 Million after 12/31/22 and receivables are right around the same amount. The fund balance on the current fund was \$2,206,000 at the end of the year which is down about \$345,000 and represents about 15 ½% of the operating budget which is a strong number. Of that amount \$1,890,000 was used to balance the 2023 budget. He explained that 80% of the revenues come from taxes for the district, 14% comes from miscellaneous revenues and anticipated revenues, which are the items that are approved in the budget each year. About 4% was used from the surplus from the previous year. In the operating expenditures 48 ½% of the monies that came in were paid out to the local school district, 32% stayed with the municipality to run the operations and the tech service and the other 12 ½% went to the County. Again, a reduction of \$345,000 in fund balance which is down about 13 ½% but it is still a healthy fund balance. The other operating account is the utility and that is in good shape; the water and sewer utility is a healthy fund balance and is down \$268,000. And, of the \$3-4 Million, half of that is being used for the 2023 budget. He congratulated the finance department and CFO Michelle Chiemiego stating that there are no comments and no recommendations. He said that Florence Township is in very good financial shape as a municipality compared to other similar sized municipalities.

RESOLUTIONS

RESOLUTION NO. 2023-172

Authorize Refund of Tax Overpayments

RESOLUTION NO. 2023-173

Certification of 2022 Audit

RESOLUTION NO. 2023-174

Canceling Taxes on Property Owned by a Totally Disabled Veteran, Block 148.01, Lot 1.04

RESOLUTION NO. 2023-175

Authorize Preparation of Trash Specifications and Bid for Sanitation Removal Services

RESOLUTION NO. 2023-176

Approving Shared Services Agreement for the Provisions of Off-Duty Police Services

RESOLUTION NO. 2023-177

Authorize Refund of Building Permit Fee

RESOLUTION NO. 2023-178

Reject all Bids for Temporary Police Building and Recreation Center Building

RESOLUTION NO. 2023-179

Canceling Taxes on Property Owned by a Totally Disabled Veteran, Block 17, Lot 2.02

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**RESOLUTION NO. 2023-180
Appoint Township Administrator as JIF Commissioner**

**RESOLUTION NO. 2023-181
Authorize Property Maintenance Liens**

**RESOLUTION NO. 2023-182
Appoint Michael J. Muchowski and Michelle Chiemiego as Privacy Officers**

Motion of Ostrander, seconded by Haas to approve Resolution Nos. 2023-172 through 2023-182.

Council Representative Marter asked about the Shared Services Agreement for Off-Duty Police Officers. Her understanding is, with third parties like Amazon or PSE&G, a lot of times our officers have to go and direct traffic and it is not at a cost to us. Same with working with other townships for the same services so our officers can go help in Bordentown, etc. She asked when we do the shared services are there costs to our township or are all of the costs absorbed by that third party?

Administrator Muchowski stated that he sat down with the Chief and the CFO to make sure there is a fee for the officer and then there is also an administrative expense so he asked that we review our administrative expense to make sure that it matches our current exposure so that there is 100% certainty that is the understanding of the situation. We are having an organization called "Jobs for Blue" come in to give a presentation, they handle the billing part of this process which would then free up the Chief who is currently logging all of the hours.

Council Representative Haas asked for clarification on the indemnification clause stating that it looks like we are holding each other "harmless" so what happens if someone gets hurt? Who pays if neither are held accountable?

Administrator Muchowski stated that he asked that specific question to the Chief and, if we were working in Mansfield Township for example, then we would bill Mansfield Township. If it were a PSE&G job, then Mansfield would bill PSE&G so it would be as if our employee was working for Florence Township and just happens to be in another municipality and the billing would just go directly to that township. If it happened to be worker's comp, it would be local and it would be ours. It would be as if they were working at a local Amazon for instance, and if that situation occurred there could be a worker's compensation claim and, built into the administrative fee is a fee for the cost of the worker's compensation. He wanted to be sure that all portions of the current administrative fee are reflective of what our current costs are and, moving forward, he wanted to be sure that those numbers do match.

Solicitor Hastie mentioned that anytime you look at an indemnification clause you want to make sure that they are parallel and one side is not indemnifying from simple negligence and the other one is a gross negligent standard or something along those lines. As long as we are both indemnifying each other for the same class of action it is probably a fair clause and if someone gets hurt everyone is going to get sued.

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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

None at this time.

REPORTS OF COMMITTEES, BOARDS AND OFFICERS

Council Representative Marter stated that she received a call from a resident regarding Maple Avenue between Station Road and Delaware Avenue with an issue at the corner of Bob's Deli and how difficult it is to get in and out of that intersection with people cutting through Maple Avenue. She had a discussion with the Chief and he said that there was once a traffic study there and he will follow up to see what can be done. The resident is asking to have that a four-way stop at Bennett Street or to stop on Maple Avenue.

Council Representative Marter also stated that she got a call from Mr. Buonnano on the corner of Spruce and Third Streets and for years he has been the unofficial crossing guard there. He lives on that corner and his granddaughter went to the middle school and when they would dismiss for the day he would stand on that corner to help the kids get across the street. She stated that it is difficult to see when you are coming from Front Street down to Fifth on Spruce Street. She met with the Chief and he put in a device to track the number of cars because it was first thought to be Amazon cutting through. But it is not Amazon, it is the parents and the concern is not the number of cars. She met with the Chief and asked about a four-way stop or whether we can turn those stop signs. She stated that on one side of Broad Street all of the streets run in one direction without stop signs and on the other side of Broad Street it is the opposite. They talked about the possibility of alternating the signs so that the fastest you could get is two streets before you have to stop. She crossed children at that corner for two days and stated that Administrator Muchowski had been out there a few times while she has been out there and she is asking if there is anything that Council can do about this or whether it goes through the Police Department?

Mayor Wilkie stated that these decisions have always been left up to the Police Department and codirected her to speak to the Police Department about the issue.

Administrator Muchowski stated that he had a preliminary conversation with the Chief and he spoke to the Superintendent as well. He stated that a traffic box was installed on Spruce between Third and Fourth because the initial thought was that it was cut through traffic from Amazon but they think it is recirculation of traffic associated with the school. They are trying to work on a solution for this issue. He is going to have the Chief reach out to the Superintendent, and give us a good solid recommendation of his overall thoughts and solutions and hopes to have an update at the next Council meeting. Administrator Muchowski stated that oftentimes historically the first few weeks of school is a bit different than the following weeks. It may just be a matter of reeducating the children on safely navigating the crossings.

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Council Representative Haas mentioned that the Economic Committee met for first time since May and they reviewed several events they held over spring and summer. Moving forward they are looking into the small business interviews. They posted one online for the hardware store and they are going to try and do highlights each week or two. They are also picking up the vacant business properties again now that there is time to do so.

REPORTS: ADMINISTRATION

Mayor

Mayor Wilkie stated that the next Council meeting will be September 20th. He highlighted two events, the Lengel tree dedication on September 17th recognizing Mr. Lengel who passed away earlier this year. And, in our agreement with the Florence Historical Society, they agreed to two open houses per year and one is being set up for September 23rd.

Michelle Chiemiego, our CFO was publicly recognized for the first time since she passed the CFO exam. Mayor Wilkie congratulated her and Council gave her a round of applause for her success.

Regarding the DVRPC Mayor Wilkie shared an email with Council last week and representatives from DVRPC will be in attendance at the September 20th meeting. He noted that there will also be two Police Officers sworn in on the 20th.

Administrator

Administrator Muchowski thanked everyone for the opportunity to serve as Administrator and stated that he looks forward to tackling the challenges moving forward. Over the last few weeks he has tried to meet with each department head to get an understanding of where the departments are and the goals and different things that we are looking for as we transition into our budget process and some of the things that need to be addressed as we move forward into the year. Everyone has been very receptive. He met with just about every employee in small groups in individual departments just to talk about the change over and some of the things that he expects and hopefully we can work towards a common goal.

He stated that he is pleasantly surprised with the reception and the response and the department heads have been phenomenal, above and beyond expectations and open to give feedback and details as to where everything stands. He is getting to the point where he wants to get a full grasp as to what they are doing on a day-to-day basis and where we stand from a budgetary standpoint. He stated that Michelle Chiemiego has taken a much more active role with trying to educate some of the department heads that haven't had as active a role in understanding their budgets and how we function and what their expectations are going to be and it has been very well received. He stated that no mass changes are being instituted at this point in time but the conversations are being started as to how we operate more efficiently as a total unit.

Administrator Muchowski also mentioned that the RFP was advertised for the PFAS mitigation system for the engineering services and design. We are hoping to get as much information as we can from the engineering firms themselves but also what they view as viable possibilities to resolve the issue. We built in some parameters that would hopefully give us a much truer cost estimate of what we can expect in the long run. It's a pilot test that they want to propose so once

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we get the system we want to look at, we are going to have it set up to pretest that process to make sure that we are getting the results that are intended. The RFP has been advertised and the process has been started to do some walk throughs and there is also a question and answer period. We are going to coordinate as we develop more of these RFPs to come up with templates so we have more consistency across the board.

Mayor Wilkie welcomed Administrator Muchowski and explained that he had been working and meeting with staff in order to get ready even before he was on the clock. He has also met with a number of the businesses in the township and he publicly thanked him for that.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None at this time.

NEW BUSINESS

- A. Review and Approval of Council Meeting Dates for 2024
- B. Proposal for Burlington Mercer Chamber of Commerce to hold their 45th Annual Street Fair at the Roebling Museum on Saturday, May 18, 2024

Council agreed to the meeting dates presented for the 2024 calendar year.

Mayor Wilkie explained that for the last 45 years the Burlington Mercer Chamber of Commerce held a Street Fair in Bordentown on Farnworth Avenue and this year Bordentown City decided they were no longer going to participate. The businesses and residents did not like that the street was closed down. The Chamber reached out to him and he met with them and they came up with the recommendation that they utilize the museum and the mill yard. This is a great location and is good for the community and an opportunity for many of our businesses and residents. This will be a function for the museum to benefit from and a fundraiser for the Chamber and it will be a great partnership. It is expected to be toned down, from the roughly 6,000-10,000 people who attended this past May. Bordentown City had paid for half of the police and EMS services and, in speaking with the Chief, he is figuring an officer or two handling traffic and an officer or two going through the property. He stated that the carnival was about \$10,000 for 4 days but this will only be one day. As far as parking is concerned, he is thinking they can make a deal with the school district and use the school parking lot and then bus people in if it got that big. And, because it is right near the light rail station people can park and utilize the light rail. He would like to continue forward with this if Council doesn't have any objections station that he thinks it will be a good partnership.

Council President Garganio stated that we need to truly push the parking where the parking needs to go. We do not need people on the avenues of Roebling with that many vehicles. It could even be an opportunity for the Boy Scouts to cut a deal with the school to use the parking lot and charge a few dollars to park like they do at the Farm Fair. Council Representative Marter stated that we also need to push the Chamber to advertise easy access to the Riverline. Administrator Muchowski explained that, in Bordentown they rented buses from the school to keep the money local as opposed to bringing in outside shuttles.

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BOARD OF HEALTH

None at this time.

MISCELLANEOUS

None at this time.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Council President Garganio opened the meeting to the public.

Melissa Bond, 14 Amboy Avenue, asked about the South Street parking lots on Amboy and Railroad Avenues and whether or not there will be any type of cross reference for those lots. She stated her daughter was issued a ticket for parking in the lot and the plate number was included on the ticket but they stated that they could not reference where the address was. She was issued a ticket and is asking how to resolve the issue or have a cross reference so that the residents that live in that area are not getting issued tickets on the first offense instead of a warning. Miss Bond also stated that there are residents on the street that put trash cans and recycle bins to hold spots and many can't park their work vehicles in those lots so they take up much of the parking on the streets as well.

Mayor Wilkie stated that you need a permit to park in both of those lots. He had her give her information to the Administrator and he will look into it. Township Clerk Erlston explained that the Clerk's Office issues those permits and the sticker has to be in the window, that is the only way that the police know that the car is permitted to be in the lot. There is no spreadsheet that the police get, they are only looking for that sticker so if your car does not have a sticker in the window you are going to get a ticket. The stickers are free, you just have to show your identification as proof that you live in that area and then you can get the permit sticker but it has to be in the window.

Miss Bond explained that she does and did have a sticker but it was not properly placed in the window of the vehicle and that her issue is more with the police running the tag, seeing that the car is registered to a resident in that area and issuing a warning and not ticketing on the first offense. Clerk Erlston agreed to speak to the Chief to see if there is something that can be done.

Miss Bond also asked if there is a schedule for the street sweeping in the township. Mayor Wilkie explained that there is probably an internal schedule that the driver adheres to but to his knowledge there is no schedule but that is something that can be looked into.

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

ENTER INTO CLOSED SESSION

Resolution 2023-183 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:

Litigation: NFI
 PFAS

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It was a Motion of Ostrander, seconded by Baldorossi to adjourn to Closed Session at 8:13 p.m. where no action will be taken. Voice vote – All ayes.

ADJOURNMENT

Council returned to the Regular meeting at 8:35 p.m. on a Motion by Ostrander, seconded by Haas. Voice Vote – All ayes. No action was taken. Motion of Marter seconded by Baldorossi to adjourn. Voice vote – All ayes. Meeting adjourned at 8:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Nancy L. Erlston, RMC
Township Clerk
/js