

## Florence Township Council Regular Session 2/7/24

Florence, New Jersey  
February 7, 2024

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 Baldorossi at 7:00 p.m. Council President Baldorossi 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 7, 2024; published in the Burlington County Times on January 7, 2024, placed on the Township website and given to the Trenton Times for information on January 7, 2024.

### ROLL CALL OF MEMBERS

Upon roll call the following were found to be present:

Present: Joseph Frappolli, John Fratinardo, Nicholas Haas, Talaya Loftin, Frank Baldorossi

Also Present: Mayor Kristan I. Marter; Thomas A. Sahol, Township Administrator; Robert Wright, Esq., Township Solicitor; Nancy L. Erlston, Township Clerk; Jenise Silinsky, Deputy Township Clerk

Absent: None

### APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- Executive Session of January 10, 2024
- Regular Session of January 17, 2024

Motion of Frappolli, seconded by Fratinardo to approve the Minutes.

Upon roll call, Council voted as follows:

- YEAS: Frappolli, Fratinardo, Haas, Loftin, Baldorossi
- NOES: None
- ABSENT: None Unanimous vote – Motion carried

### FINANCIAL CORRESPONDENCE

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

- CFO's Cash Reports and Budget Reports for November 2023 and December 2023
- Township Clerk's Monthly Report for January 2024

Upon roll call, Council voted as follows:

- YEAS: Frappolli, Fratinardo, Haas, Loftin, Baldorossi
- NOES: None
- ABSENT: None Unanimous vote – Motion carried

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Motion of Haas, seconded by Fratinaro to approve the **Treasurer’s Bill List**.

Upon roll call, Council voted as follows:

- YEAS: Frappolli, Fratinaro, Haas, Loftin, Baldorossi
  - NOES: None
  - ABSENT: None
- Unanimous vote – Motion carried

**REGULAR CORRESPONDENCE**

- A. Memo from Township Clerk regarding return of Ward 2, District 3 Polling location to the Fountain of Life Gym.

Motion of Haas, seconded by Fratinaro to approve the correspondence.

Upon roll call, Council voted as follows:

- YEAS: Frappolli, Fratinaro, Haas, Loftin, Baldorossi
  - NOES: None
  - ABSENT: None
- Unanimous vote – Motion carried

**APPLICATIONS**

- A. On-Site 50/50 and On-Site Merchandise Raffle on March 2, 2024 at Florence Township Memorial H.S., 1050 Cedar Lane, Florence, NJ at 6:00 p.m. for the Florence Township Student Performing Arts Booster Club
- B. On-Site Merchandise Raffle and On-Site 50/50 on March 3, 2024 at the Florence Township Community Center, 69 Main Street, Roebing, NJ from 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. for the Florence Township Memorial High School Parent Organization
- C. Bingo, On-Site Merchandise Raffle and On-Site 50/50 on March 23, 2024 at the Riverfront School, 500 East Front Street, Florence, NJ from 4:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. for the Florence Township Riverfront School Parent Teacher Organization
- D. Social Affair Permit for Franics W. Robbins Post 194 for a Night at the Races at the Legion Post 194, 601 Broad Street, Florence, NJ on March 22, 2024 from 6:30 p.m. to 11:30 p.m.

Motion of Fratinaro, seconded by Loftin to receive and file the applications.

Upon roll call, Council voted as follows:

- YEAS: Frappolli, Fratinaro, Haas, Loftin, Baldorossi
  - NOES: None
  - ABSENT: None
- Unanimous vote – Motion carried

**PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Council President Baldorossi opened the meeting to the public at this time. Seeing no one wishing to be heard, it was the Motion of Haas, seconded by Fratinaro to close the public portion of the meeting. Voice Vote – All Ayes.

**RESOLUTIONS**

**RESOLUTION NO. 2024-50**  
**Authorize Township Engineer to Prepare Plans, Specifications and Solicit Bids for 2023/2024**  
**Community Development Block Grant Program**

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**RESOLUTION NO. 2024-51**

**Approve Current Estimate No. 1 for Hornberger Avenue Pump Station**

**RESOLUTION NO. 2024-52**

**Shared Services Agreement with Burlington County to Perform Certain Works and Repairs**

**RESOLUTION NO. 2024-53**

**Authorize Execution of an Agreement with Amusements of America for the 2024 Carnival**

**RESOLUTION NO. 2024-54**

**Shared Services Agreement with Chesterfield Township for a Certified Recycling Professional**

**RESOLUTION NO. 2024-55**

**Approve Reduction of Performance Bonds, United Brakes & Clutches,  
2039 Route 130, Block 159, Lot 4.01**

**RESOLUTION NO. 2024-56**

**Approve Change Order No. 1 for Hornberger Avenue Pump Station**

**RESOLUTION NO. 2024-57**

**Authorize Application for a Local Recreation Improvement Grant  
from New Jersey Department of Community Affairs**

**RESOLUTION NO. 2024-58**

**Authorize Sustainable Jersey Grant Application**

Motion of Fratinaro, seconded by Haas to approve Resolution Nos. 2024-50 through 2024-58.

Upon roll call, Council voted as follows:

- YEAS: Frappolli, Fratinaro, Haas, Loftin, Baldorossi
  - NOES: None
  - ABSENT: None
- Unanimous vote – Motion carried

**ORDINANCES**

None at this time.

**REPORTS OF COMMITTEES, BOARDS AND OFFICERS**

Council Representative Haas explained that the Economic Committee Reorganization meeting was held and they reviewed the vacant properties list and went over a few projects that are in the works in the town.

Council Representative Fratinaro explained that they appointed the professionals and the chairman was selected at the Planning Board Reorganization meeting.

**REPORTS: ADMINISTRATION**

**Mayor**

Mayor Marter appointed Clerk Nancy Erlston as Acting Mayor through Proclamation for four days from Friday February 9<sup>th</sup> through close of day Monday February 12<sup>th</sup>.

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Mayor Marter also mentioned that she attended the Economic Development Committee meeting and brought an opportunity for us to participate in what is called the DARE Business Network 30 Mayors and 50 Developers that are going to be at Rowan College in Deptford on June 5<sup>th</sup>. She spoke with the committee in order to try to get them involved and we have a list of different properties that may be good candidates for small businesses. They will be presenting to developers that are more along the lines of small business and trying to find different locations for their businesses in different towns that will be attending and we are going to participate in that.

In conjunction with the Economic Development Committee, they had talked about these properties that were identified that could accommodate new business in town. Mayor Marter said that she keeps hearing “it’s so hard to do business in Florence” and she decided to take it upon herself to talk to some of the businesses here in town and see what it is like to start a business, what challenges they faced and if things here are different than any other town. We really want to bring small business to our town and make it a little easier for them to generate more interest in our town.

### **Administrator**

Administrator Sahol explained that Burlington County is interested in doing a presentation with regards to the Route 130, Delaware Avenue, Florence-Columbus Road infrastructure improvements. He asked Council if the workshop meeting on March 13<sup>th</sup> works for everyone he will go ahead and set that up.

He also shared a concern that was raised during a department meeting about the safety and security of the municipal building and the openness of the building after hours when there is no need to do business. He asked Council for feedback and opinions on the matter explaining that there is currently some staffing during daytime hours on the weekends. And, the building will still be open in the front until we move forward with some greater efficiencies with the way we do business on weekends for police reports as well as boat permits, etc. The building could be closed from the end of business Friday until the beginning of the day Monday. It is normally unheard of that a municipal building is left unlocked and unattended basically 24 hours a day. They discussed the possibility of developing a procedure to authorize someone to have access to a key if they need to use the front conference room for meetings and things of that nature. This will only be done after the physical drop box is moved to the outside of the building and at that point, we would begin the process of locking the front of the building. We would certainly notify the public through all of our social media channels and post it on the doors in advance. In short order we are going to be implementing an online permit issuance platform so people can be at the dock getting a permit sent directly to their phones if they decide if they want to get a daily or if they were just going to get their annual permit. We are going to make it easier and remove the need to always come to the building. We will begin the process of moving the lockbox outdoors so it is secure and then we will give you notice in advance.

Administrator Sahol thanked Council Representative Loftin for a great summary of our first meeting with the building renovations committee. He had a meeting with the Chief, Command Staff and with the architects and engineers to get a basic idea as to what they can give us for a proposal. Based on the recommendation, the proposal moving forward is moving away from renovating the building and into a standalone building. He has to get a proposal to Council so they can decide if this is the route we are going to take and the cost. The engineer will do a survey and the proposal will include a soil bearing capacity investigation to make sure we are not going in the wrong location with the police department. He thanked the Mayor and Council Representatives Loftin and Haas for attending the first meeting and stated that it was a very productive meeting. Command Staff also expressed their appreciation for the time given them.

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Council Representative Haas stated that upon looking at the Master Plan that is a recreation open space area that is being discussed and asked if any other land was looked at before it was decided on that specific spot. Administrator Sahol explained that there were some concepts discussed along Route 130 that required purchase of some highway frontage but anything that was looked at was not municipally owned already so there seemed to be some heavy costs involved. That was done by Command Staff to ensure that they identified remote locations and what it came down to was that this is as focused as you can get, keeping your resources for this building and the court. Council Representative Haas asked if there was any expression of displeasure or concern in not having the police department located in the same building as the courts and tax office. Administrator Sahol said that the concern was vetted through staff and there were no issues brought up.

Administrator Sahol thanked the Governing Body for adopting Resolution No. 2024-52, the shared service with Burlington County stating that it adds another layer of opportunity for us to work together with our governing body at the County and gives us a nice resource to provide some services that we may otherwise have to go out and seek through the private sector. We still have an investment paying Burlington County for the time but it is obviously a savings versus going into the private sector markets for certain things. It has proven successful in the past in working with them.

He mentioned that we are going to keep Patriotic Day on July 6<sup>th</sup> this year. Marty Eckert reached out to the fireworks vendor who expressed his gratitude for the opportunity to be able to provide a proposal. All of the vendors are really happy to do business in Florence, they think it's a great service that we offer and they don't anticipate it being insurmountable when it comes to a minor adjustment that might be necessary due to the weekend's event closely aligned with the 4<sup>th</sup> of July.

### **UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

- Water & Sewer Rates

Holman Frenia Allison, PC conducted a rate study in order to determine the financial status of the utility in relation to existing and future debt. In the case of the 2023 rate study, it was determined the financial stability of the utility is precarious and a rate increase is necessary. Anthony Mannino of HFA shared five rate comparison scenarios and explained the two scenarios that would work best. Scenario 1 which has less of an overall increase, as compared to the compounding effects of Scenario 3. The Governing Body was shown other scenarios but the reason they are not recommended is due to the fact that none of those ensure the ending fund-balance will be in a healthy state in all of the years shown in the study. The fund balance is extremely important for the utility and that is the protection against emergency unforeseen occurrences. A typical and safe fund balance is at least three million dollars.

Whatever occurs in the utility fund directly relates to the municipal finance operations and budget, this is because our utility is required to be self-liquidating. This means revenues must be equal or exceed expenses. In 2023, the utility became non-self-liquidating and the debt in the utility suddenly impacted the municipal finance side of our operations. The impact was to the overall municipal debt ratio which now exceeds that which is permitted by the State of New Jersey. To help correct the imbalance in the debt ratio, the township must take action to reduce some of the future township debt which has been incurred but not yet funded.

The rate used in the analysis was \$923.34, a combination of both the water & sewer rate, annually. Based on a report of last year's water & sewer usage, HFA was able to estimate each rate. The estimated average consumption rate per user was found to be about 75,900 gallons in 2022, which is the consumption rate used in this analysis. The water rate is as follows: the first 12,000 gallons have a rate of \$52.27 and \$5.75 per 1,000 gallons in excess. The sewer rate is as follows: the first 12,000 gallons have a

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rate of \$62.73 and \$6.90 per 1,000 gallons in excess. Assuming the annual average of 75,900 gallons, the water rate was found to be \$419.70 and the sewer rate was found to be \$503.64, \$923.34 combined.

Anthony Mannino of HFA explained that Scenario 1 incorporates a one-time water & sewer rate increase of 41% in 2024 and no further increases thereafter. It is projecting a fund balance of around \$3,000,000 annually with an increase to the rates in 2024. This scenario has a largest percentage increase but would only occur one time in the next 5 years. Over the 5-year period, each residence on average would see an increase of \$1,514.28 in total for 5 years. This scenario is the only one in which the targeted fund balance of \$3,000,000 is most closely maintained for the 5 projected years. The water & sewer utility fund is also in an operating surplus in the last year of this analysis.

In Scenario 3, it incorporates a 4-year water & sewer rate increase of 25% in 2024 and a 7.75% increase thereafter. Over the 5-year period, each residence on average would see an increase of \$1,488.30 in total for 5 years. The targeted fund balance is not met or neared until 2027. However, this scenario also allows the utility fund to be operating in a surplus starting in 2026 and continues to 2027.

During the last 5 years, the town's water & sewer utility fund balance has maintained itself well and mostly remained around \$3,000,000. In the 5-year look-forward projection, expenditures realize a substantial increase, mostly due to estimated interest on notes, capital improvements, and other expenses while during the same time losing some large revenue collections from warehouse closures in 2023. Due to this, the water & sewer utility fund is projected to be in an operating deficit for 2023-2027, in addition to realizing an operating deficit in 2022.

He explained that, should the town take no action, it is looking at the potential for a deficit in the fund balance overall by 2025. The scenarios recommended in this analysis are each based on different factors; (1) to identify a single annual water & sewer rate increase required to maintain an ending annual fund balance of \$3,000,000 as seen in scenario 1; (2) to identify different rate increase structures to the annual water & sewer rate to meet or near the targeted ending fund balance of \$3,000,000 by 2027 as seen in scenarios 2 and 3; (3) identify a 2-year rate increase structure to have the fund balance remain above \$0.00 through 2027; (4) to identify a 3-year rate increase structure that provides a large safety net as seen in scenario 5; and (5) to identify a 4-year rate increase structure that is less expensive compared to the others but still can put the utility at an operating surplus by 2027 as seen in scenario 6. Scenarios 1 through 4 also range from a larger single rate increase to smaller increases each year during the 5-year projection period as seen in scenario 4.

Of the scenarios presented, Scenario 1 is a one-time increase and maintains an ending fund balance near or above the target of \$3,000,000 for each of the 5 years projected. This will ensure a buffer if unexpected expenses arise or drops in revenue occur. Scenarios 2 and 3 are similar in that they aim for the same goal of a targeted fund balance of \$3,000,000 by 2027. Scenario 2 is slightly cheaper on average per resident, only by about \$12, but the rate increase is more consistent, 14% from 2024-2027, as opposed to that of scenario 3, a 25% increase in 2024 and a 7.75% increase in each year 2025-2027. Scenario 4 displays a 2-year rate structure in which the fund balance would remain just above breakeven by 2027. This scenario, while having the lowest impact to the average resident, would require an additional rate increase (assuming the projected costs in this analysis) by 2027 or early 2028 to avoid creating a fund balance deficit. Scenario 5 would be the largest cost increase but would allow for plenty of variability in expenses and utility fund revenues and expenditures. Scenario 6 allows for a less expensive cost increase while still getting the utility fund to operate in a surplus by 2027.

Council asked Mr. Mannino to have more scenarios worked up to try and save taxpayers a little money and the rates will be further discussed at the Workshop meeting next week.

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- Weiss Development

Mayor Marter explained that a number of years ago there was a developer that wanted to put apartments and a hotel near the Wawa on Route 130. This would also have helped us meet our affordable housing requirement. They had initially presented it as the first section of apartments would go up, then the hotel and then the next section of apartments. We wanted to make sure that hotel happened in between otherwise there was a concern that it would not happen. When Covid hit, the whole market changed with regards to hotels and they are having difficulty being able to get a hotel financed there. They wanted to change the plan and put all of the units in and then wait and see what will happen with the hospitality market. In conversations, it was decided that maybe we look into some alternatives if the whole hotel industry is a problem.

She asked Council what other types of things could be built in between the sections of units besides a hotel so that it would still be a three-phase project. There would be more than 300 units which is spelled out in a document that went to the Planning Board where it is all reduced into writing in the approval there. Administrator Sahol explained that they will have to come back to the Board because the phasing of that project will change. The first ask is can we build everything and then come back on it. If they can't build a hotel then give us two of something else or build the first two units and build maybe a restaurant and then go for the last phase. All of the roadway improvements must occur, first and foremost.

### NEW BUSINESS

- Virtual Meetings

Mayor Marter explained that there have been some issues with disruptions during the meetings which sometimes prevents us from posting the video to the website for the public and the entire community loses if no one gets to see the video. Even though the minutes are thorough, it is still not the same as listening to all of the details spoken in the meeting. She asked Council for guidance going forward with the way the meetings are handled. One option is a view only meeting and, if anyone would like to speak, they would have to attend in person. Another option would be to get rid of Zoom altogether but that option is not ideal in her opinion. Any disruptions can not just be edited out because it is part of a public meeting. It is unfortunate, but she asked Council for feedback regarding how we proceed.

They discussed options to make it so that people could still Zoom in for the convenience of not having to physically come to a meeting. Mayor Marter stated that she does not want to completely shut down the Zoom option and recording of the meetings. Council Representative Loftin asked what other towns are doing and if any other towns run Zoom meetings. Solicitor Wright mentioned that there is only one town out of the four that he represented since post Covid, that offers a virtual option and that is listen only. Another town records the meetings and they get posted a day or two afterward on the website and the other two have no recording whatsoever.

They discussed having a question and answer type of section on the website where people could leave their questions and they can be brought up at a future meeting for discussion. Emails could also be sent to an inbox where the questions could be considered for future discussions. Mayor Marter would like to try and protect our meeting so that others have the opportunity to listen in.

Administrator Sahol recommended Council digest the idea and come up with some thoughts to be discussed and decided at the next meeting. Council agreed.

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**BOARD OF HEALTH**

None at this time.

**MISCELLANEOUS**

None at this time.

**PUBLIC COMMENTS**

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

Bryan Hewitt, 1080 Grove Street, asked if we have download numbers on the meetings to know how many people are actually utilizing the saved meetings/recordings to get a perspective on how people are accessing Council meetings and the information coming from them. And, as far as the meetings go, if there is offensive material is there a way to put a disclaimer explaining that some material may be offensive, is that allowed?

Administrator Sahol explained that the website does not have a per page count that you see on some social media sites. He can ask the web developer if there is something in the background that they can run to get an idea. Solicitor Wright explained that he is unaware if videos can be edited once they are produced and part of the problem is that, through Zoom the video is not editable so there is not an ability to put in a frame to mark something as sensitive content or to edit out a remark during the meeting.

Bryan Hewitt also asked if the Economic Development Committee has minutes that are available online? Council Representative Haas explained that they are usually posted the week prior to the meetings.

Mr. Hewitt then commented about the Weiss development stating that he understands trying to work that into something else and exploring other options but stated that recently they started listing the property and they are trying to get \$3.5 Million for the 3 acres. It is still very early in whatever it is they are planning now and obviously there has been a bit of a rebound in hotels and such and you have developments such as Burlington who is expanding and a few others that have changed the dynamics. Post-Covid obviously decreased usage but there is also development going on here and around here that may change that market analysis again. He thinks the hotel is a good idea but this is the first time they are trying to market it and get it on the open market so he said he wouldn't be too hasty to make any decisions because now they could actually be trying to sell that lot to someone whereas before they were not doing that.

Seeing no one else wishing to be heard, it was a motion of Haas, seconded by Loftin to close the public comment portion of the meeting.

Upon roll call, Council voted as follows:

- YEAS: Frappolli, Fratinardo, Haas, Loftin, Baldorossi
  - NOES: None
  - ABSENT: None
- Unanimous vote – Motion carried

**ENTER INTO CLOSED SESSION**

Resolution 2024-59 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  
Personnel



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It was a Motion of Haas, seconded by Fratinardo to adjourn to Closed Session at 8:54 p.m. where no action will be taken. Voice Vote – All Ayes.

**ADJOURNMENT**

Council returned to the Regular meeting at 10:13 p.m. on a Motion by Fratinardo, seconded by Haas. Voice Vote – All Ayes. No action was taken. Motion of Fratinardo seconded by Frappolli to adjourn. Voice vote – All Ayes. Meeting adjourned at 10:13 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Nancy L. Erlston, RMC  
Township Clerk  
/js