

Florence Township Council Regular Session 11/1/23

Florence, New Jersey
November 1, 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 Vice President Haas at 7:00 p.m. Council Vice President Haas 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

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

Absent: Bruce Garganio

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- Closed Session of September 20, 2023
- Closed Sessions of October 4th, 11th and 18th, 2023
- Regular Session of October 4, 2023
- Regular Session of October 11, 2023

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

FINANCIAL CORRESPONDENCE

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

- CFO's Cash Reports and Budget Reports for September 2023
- Treasurer's Bill List

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Upon roll call, Council voted as follows:

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

REGULAR CORRSPONDENCE

None at this time.

APPLICATIONS

None at this time.

PUBLIC COMMENT

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

RESOLUTIONS

**RESOLUTION NO. 2023-204
Authorizing Refund of Certain Overpayment Water & Sewer**

**RESOLUTION NO. 2023-205
Cancel Taxes on Property Owned by a Totally Disabled Veteran, Block 143.07, Lot 7**

**RESOLUTION NO. 2023-206
Authorize Refund of Housing Inspection Fee**

**RESOLUTION NO. 2023-207
Authorize Application for a Local Recreation Improvement Grant from NJDCA**

**RESOLUTION NO. 2023-208
Authorize Application for a Local Improvement Grant from NJDCA**

**RESOLUTION NO. 2023-209
Supporting the Request to Vacate a Public Alleyway in the Village of Roebling**

**RESOLUTION NO. 2023-210
Approve Partial Payment No. 2 for 2023 Local Road Program**

**RESOLUTION NO. 2023-211
Award Contract for Waterworks Playground
and H. Kenneth Wilkie Rivers Edge Park Improvements**

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Council Vice President Haas asked about Resolution No. 2023-209 and the alleys in Roebling and how it will work moving forward if a resident sells a property that has already taken over an alley. Solicitor Hastie explained that the next step would be to let the residents know that we are open to this and that they would have to go out and get a surveyor who would draw up a legal description on their property when they vacate and then we can do an ordinance legally vacating the alleyway.

Motion of Ostrander, seconded by Marter to approve Resolution Nos. 2023-204 through 2023-211.

Upon roll call, Council voted as follows:

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

ORDINANCES

None at this time.

REPORTS OF COMMITTEES, BOARDS AND OFFICERS

Council Representative Marter explained that a resident from Birch Hollow reached out to her about the amount of noise that they are experiencing with the volume of trucks going by. He was asking if anything can be done about the amount of noise for the residents that live along the roadway and she asked Council if there is something that can be considered for the residents that live along there when they start to do that reconstruction.

She stated that back in July there was a truck rollover and she reached out to Troy Singleton’s office and they were going to start looking in to the situation with the turnpike and that southbound exit ramp. Then on October 10th there was another rollover and she reached out again and set up a meeting with his Chief of Staff and two members of the New Jersey Turnpike Authority for November 8th in order to talk about those issues that have occurred. Chief Boldizar will also be attending that meeting. They are already looking at additional signage and she is going to try and request the possibility of rumble strips or something so that when they are coming off of that ramp they know to slow down. They are working with the Turnpike and hopefully that will have some impact for us.

She also explained that the Senator’s office is working with Amazon to provide meals to people in need in our community for the Thanksgiving holiday and they are requesting that we allow them to use our Community Center for that event.

Council Representative Marter asked where the idea for the workorder software originated? Was it something that was initiated by management because they are having an issue and there is a need for it or did it come from Colliers who are the ones who presented? Mayor Wilkie explained that he was looking to improve communication and coordination of the community and Bob Mullin of Colliers had mentioned that they had a program. He explained that there is no tracking system in place right now.

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Council Representative Marter asked again for an update on the rate study. Mayor Wilkie explained that there is a draft that needs to be cleaned up after Administrator Muchowski does some internal reviews but we have not been given a rate yet. The questions have been asked and the research is being done.

Council Representative Ostrander wished Council Representative Marter the best of luck with the election and she wished him the same.

Council Representative Marter stated that the Fall Fest was amazing and not very costly. The Recreation Committee had put it together and there were many participants. It was really a very nice festival and she commended the Recreation Committee for a really nice job.

Vice President Haas congratulated the high school fall sports teams that made the playoffs. He congratulated Katie Studzinski for scoring 50+ goals this year, Andrew Wittkamp for 100+ saves for his career in soccer and he also stated that the high school girls field hockey team will be in the semifinals at 2pm Friday, November 3rd.

REPORTS: ADMINISTRATION

Mayor

Mayor Wilkie commented on the Fall Festival stating that there were many people out of the Recreation Committee who organized it and many organizations partnered in order to make that happen. He thanked Council for approving the playground and the tennis courts stating that there will be a new comprehensive playground in the spring and the tennis courts will be finished up at Wilkie Park to include pickle ball.

Broad Street has been awarded for the 2024 municipal aid. It was done in phases at one time and he is unsure how much of the roadway will get done with this funding. We did receive the funding for 2023 on Hornberger which is Phase 4 and that will improve Hornberger from the railroad tracks to the bridge. We purposefully didn't do anything more on Hornberger from the bridge to Route 130 because of Project Freedom and the pump station being moved but once those projects get done Phase 5 will finish up Hornberger Avenue.

He mentioned that Administrator Muchowski was meeting with the Chief and NJDOT and has been told that the intersection of Florence-Columbus Road and Route 130 is supposedly going to be fixed by Thanksgiving.

November 11th is Veteran's Day and the American Legion Post 194 does the traditional veterans service at 11am at the Eagle Monument on Broad and Front Streets and then the Township program will be done at 11:30am at the Veteran's monument in front of the municipal building.

Administrator

Administrator Muchowski explained that we got the renewal numbers back on our health insurance and we should be coming in with a flat renewal as well as on the dental insurance. Mayor Wilkie went on to explain that when we went self-funded in 2013 or so, we moved from the State Health Benefits Plan into a plan that we created. Last year the State Health Benefits

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increased by 20+% for municipalities and this year there was an additional 7% increase so you are saving taxpayers thousands of dollars and saving your employees a significant amount in healthcare premiums.

Administrator Muchowski also explained that each department head is going to be meeting individually with our CFO in preparation for next year's budget.

He explained that in the meeting with Chief Boldizar and the NJDOT they spoke about the expanded issues that they face. Not only the new traffic patterns coming in from Florence-Columbus Road but coming off of the turnpike we are seeing different traffic flows over the last few years. They had a pretty in-depth conversation and it seemed to be a good start to figuring what more needs to be done. We are going to stay on top of the situation.

Division of Law

Solicitor Hastie explained that all of the real estate documents on Project Freedom were in Escrow on October 20th and on October 24th it was received and transferred. The tax indication happened at that point so Project Freedom has the money and the property to go ahead with the project. On Friday, November 3rd, the Township is going to close on the VFW property. And regarding the Weiss redevelopment agreement they have let us know that they are going to wait us out.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

A. Film Ready Community Presentation

Council Representative Marter explained that back in September an email was received regarding a New Jersey Film Ready workshop that was happening at Camden County College. She and Chief Boldizar attended. The film industry is starting to boom in New Jersey. They put together a program in order to have towns get film ready for any kind of filming that would happen in their towns. She asked them to present to our Council as well as any community members that wanted to join in to talk about the program and why we would want to do it and what it means to our town. She introduced Elizabeth Parchment who is in the New Jersey Economic Development Authority as well as Joe Mara, who is part of the New Jersey Motion Picture and Television Commission.

Ms. Parchment explained a little about Film Ready New Jersey and that the annual production revenue in 2017 hovered around \$67 Million and major motion picture in the state was very scarce. Those who worked in the industry had to travel to other states like New York, California, Georgia, Texas, etc. and it was very hard to make a living in New Jersey but times have since changed. Last year the annual production revenue rose to \$700 Million and we are on track to cracking a billion dollar industry. She offered some historical context and relevance to how we got here explaining that in the early 1900s the Edison Company built the world's first movie studio and New Jersey became the birthplace of the American Film Industry. Before Hollywood Fort Lee, New Jersey was the film capital of the world. But New Jersey's time as the world's movie capital was very brief.

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By the late 1910s filmmakers began a mass exodus to California. Between the 1920s and the late 1970s there were very few films made in New Jersey but in 1977 the tide began to change and the New Jersey Motion Picture and Television Commission was created by an act of the State Legislature. So starting in 1978 and continuing well into the 2000s many blockbuster movies were filmed in New Jersey. However, in the early 2000s Canada, as well as nearby states, began offering lucrative tax incentives to filmmakers making it harder for New Jersey to compete. Until 2018 when the Garden State Film and Digital Media Job Act was enacted by Governor Phil Murphy, which is a tax credit program that has created a constant flow of filmmaking activity in New Jersey.

Part of New Jersey's success is our diverse landscapes from waterfalls to downtowns to Victorian homes to the Jersey shore to buildings, parks, college campuses, farm land, etc. Florence Township has a very unique charm that could attract a producer's attention. She spoke about the economic impact a town can enjoy when a production sets up shop in the community. They are coming with cash to pour into local businesses and economy because the motion picture and television industry is an ecosystem within which there are limitless opportunities for collaboration in exchange for businesses and professionals alike.

Recently her office launched the Film Ready New Jersey program and, with a growing film industry presence in New Jersey the film ready program is designed to support municipalities and counties as they work to accommodate location filming and market their communities as filming destinations positioning the state as a top production destination. They hosted a Film Ready workshop in September for municipalities in South Jersey and Florence Township was one of them. She briefly went through what the program looks like and how it can benefit Florence Township.

The premise behind the Film Ready program is for towns to stay ready so they do not have to get ready. It is a five-step certification program that helps educate municipalities and counties on how to get film production and productions in their town. They have a certification process that they go through and this is what Florence Township is attempting to go through to become a film ready community. One of the first steps is to attend one of their workshops. Another step is to designate a film ready liaison. This person should know the ins and outs of the community and liaise with the production industry. They have to be employed by the municipal government and they are the ones that facilitate the location approvals and liaise with the different departments (fire, police, etc.) that may be involved within a production or shoot. One of the next steps is adopting a formal permit process to put some guidelines in place like a code of conduct which are basically just filmmaker guidelines that guide a town in a production role and put some structure in place. One of the most important steps is how you showcase your community. And one of the last steps is that they ask the town to submit a list of local resources so that when a production comes to your town they are looking at restaurants, caterers, hotels and lodging, office supplies, car rentals or gas stations, etc. It is a whole ecosystem and these businesses benefit from a production coming into your town.

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Joe Mara has been with the New Jersey Motion Picture and Television Commission since 2012 and one of his main goals previously was photographing up and down the state. He explained a little about their website and showed how a production company would go about choosing a location using the categories and search features. Once a production company finds something they are interested in, they click and it will send a notification directly to their office and they take over to make sure they have the proper insurance and they are properly budgeted. They look into whether or not they are first time or long term filmmakers, etc. so they can make sure that before the production speaks to a town that they can ensure the production is legitimate. Once that happens usually the town will take over from there and they then take a backseat but more of a liaison to make sure that everyone is communicating properly.

He explained how Florence Township can start to raise our profile on the website. You would first let the residents and businesses know they can go to the website and scroll down on the location database and “submit a location.” Once there, they can fill out information about the property/location, description, address, contact details and upload a maximum of 25 photos right from your phone. This information will go directly to them, they will review it, and then they will approve it. The municipal liaison will have access to the database and they can add locations and upload photos directly to the website as part of their certification for film ready. He stated that they will be coming into town next Wednesday to take a tour and take some photographs as well.

Council Representative Marter explained that she and Marty Eckert have a list of locations to photograph but if there are people in the community that can come up with other locations as well, we are open to any ideas of things that we may miss. Mostly everything that they are photographing are township properties. They have not highlighted any specific homes because they are really looking right now at the township properties. But any resident can upload their own home if they would like to participate in any filmmaking that may come to our town and the benefit for residents is that they will receive a stipend if they use their home. There is definitely some motivation if anyone is looking to have their homes used.

Regarding the ordinance, she and Administrator Muchowski and Solicitor Hastie sat and developed an ordinance which was included in Council’s packets for review. And, if there are no issues, hopefully it will be passed at the next meeting. The deadline is December 1st and the meeting is not until December 6th but the commission is willing to work with us so that we can meet that deadline. We want to be in the January cohort in order for us to be included because the next cohort won’t be until summer. Right now we have not decided on a liaison but she has been working with Marty because he has been available. We just have to put together at least five resources in our town, restaurants, caterers, gas stations, etc., and then we will be ready to go.

Bryan Hewitt, 1080 Grove Street, asked what the primary driver is right now- what are the inquiries for? He also asked logistically, is it about having hotels and those types of things in the town that you are working in or can it be within a certain radius? Because we are a smaller town we will be able to check off most of those boxes but those amenities are just a little further out.

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Mr. Mara stated that in terms of the location it varies depending on the project. The more resources and locations that can be highlighted that the township has, the more interest we can get from the film industry. When they get inquiries for a specific location they create location packages so if they are looking for houses on a cul-de-sac or ranch houses, etc., they can search those and put them all in a package and send them out to the production companies and if they see something they like then they will reach out. Any location that gets put on the database also goes into a global website.

Ms. Parchment added that they are always looking for more farmland and farms. As far as the production resources the premise for the program for a community to become film ready is to amplify the resources that are in the town. There may be resources that are nearby but they fall into a different town and that town is amplifying their resources. She explained that if there are some categories that your township can not fulfill, they can open it up so they can find categories and businesses to satisfy. There may be something that is not as evident that may be in Florence that would not be in a different location or in a different community that can service the film and television industry. So they can work on the back end of that and make sure that you are able to meet that part of the certification but the idea is to amplify the businesses and resources in Florence Township so the economic impact is coming to your community.

Council Representative Marter confirmed that whatever resources we do not have in Florence Township, specifically hotels, won't exclude us, it would just mean that we would have to find services close by. It wouldn't be included in our specific township but would still be available and it would not exclude us from participating.

Mr. Hewitt asked if there is data in terms of how much development is going on with these studios and how much is projected to go on or is that just up in the air? Is there some type of forecast as to how many new studios you see being built throughout the state in the next few years. Ms. Parchment explained that typically until the company announces their plan, we would not have discretion to release that information prior to the company or the studio making their official announcements. Because the industry is very on track to being the film capital and we are building an industry that is too big to fail, their vision and plan is to build up a permanent infrastructure in the state of New Jersey. Typically, when the information comes out in the news, that is when they can start sharing information.

Council Representative Marter thanked Elizabeth Parchment and Joe Mara for their presentation stating that she thinks it is exciting for Florence Township. Our town is pretty unique and she believes that we might be looking at something coming our way.

B. Proposed Lighting Ordinance Section 91-87 of the Florence Township Code

Mayor Wilkie explained that there had been some issues with PSE&G and he reached out to Chairman Mudge and asked to hold a joint meeting so we can get the ordinance going before the end of the year. He explained that this is to "get teeth" mainly in our warehouses and non-residential areas that have lights that are offensive. This ordinance is the same ordinance that went through the Environmental Commission meeting in June but one of the things it picked up here and at the Planning Board was to include residential. In his conversations with Council

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Representative Marter and John Pagano the worry is less about residential and more about nonresidential. That is the only change that was emailed out to Council. The last time Council looked at it, the question was raised about PSE&G and how this would affect them.

Jay Defleece with Colliers explained that Public Service is only commenting on the writing level and they won't go down to the 3500 lumens that we discussed they will only go down to 4000 lumens so, as the Mayor said, it only affects those lighting fixtures that belong to PSE&G. Basically, that was a courtesy review to them to show them the ordinance but most of the time this ordinance is written more about how private property owners need to submit lighting plans for these new requirements.

Dave Mudge, the Chair of the Environmental Commission stated that the moving focus behind this was the complaints that we are getting from residents near warehouse type situations. They realized when they reviewed the Township Ordinance that it was a little dated and they thought that now is a good time to look into it and give the Planning and Zoning Boards the ability to control what comes in. They have seen several examples of intrusive lighting that has occurred. We are not looking to compromise safety or the ability of any particular entity to conduct its business but what we are looking at it to improve the quality of life and give the township exactly the tools they need to control that so that we get what the township would like to see and not what an engineer and some other community thinks.

Mayor Wilkie explained that if Council is in agreement to move forward, it can be introduced on November 8th and that would then refer it to the Planning Board who would give their comments. They don't need to approve, they just need to say whether it is consistent with the Master Plan or not. If they find that it is inconsistent with the Master Plan it would require four members of Council to approve because you have to have a super majority to approve it. Council agreed to move forward.

C. Sustainable Jersey Bronze Level Certification

Mayor Wilkie introduced Chairman David Mudge and the senior member of the Environmental Commission Paul Ordog who had been Chairman for 25 or 30 years. For the Sustainable New Jersey we received the bronze certification and we contracted with Mark Remsa to work with the Environmental Commission who are all volunteers. He stated that it has been a goal to get to Sustainable New Jersey certification and it is not an easy process and we were able to get the bronze certification. Deepah Patel took the lead on working with Mr. Remsa to get that done and it is something for Council for next year. Mr. Remsa has put a plan together explaining what needs to be done to keep the 150. And then there is another 200 points that you need to get to silver which is the next level up. That is not something that is easy and it is not designed to be easy you just have to figure out which direction the community wants to go in. There is a presentation coming up at the League of Municipalities for the bronze award.

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NEW BUSINESS

A. Review of the Best Practice Inventory Questionnaire

Administrator Muchowski explained that this is our review with our CFO of our policies and procedures in order to get State Aid. We had to meet a minimum score of 29 and we are at 39 so we are well above where we need to be. He took this as an opportunity to sit down with the CFO and go over some of the items that we have and have not reviewed and things to look at as we move forward, not just from a scoring standpoint but just from how we are working within our township finances.

BOARD OF HEALTH

None at this time.

MISCELLANEOUS

None at this time.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Council Vice President Haas opened the meeting to the public.

Bryan Hewitt, 1080 Grove Street, asked about the previous software presentation that was given on workorders and if there were any competitors so he can look into these and go through their websites. Administrator Muchowski explained that one that we specifically looked at and we have some of their other software is Edmunds which is a provider for municipal services. They have a similar product that has workorder systems. He explained that no decisions have been made at this time and he wants to sit down with administration and determine the course of action and path they want to go down and make some decisions at that time.

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

ADJOURNMENT

Motion of Marter seconded by Baldorossi to adjourn. Voice vote – All ayes. Meeting adjourned at 8:09 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Nancy L. Erlston, RMC
Township Clerk
/js