

Florence Township Council Executive Session 1/15/25

Florence, New Jersey
January 15, 2025

The Florence Township Council held an executive meeting on the above date in the Municipal Complex, 711 Broad Street, Florence, New Jersey. The meeting was called to order by Council President Frappolli at 7:00 p.m. Council President Frappolli 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 3, 2025; published in the Burlington County Times on January 7, 2024 and January 5, 2025, placed on the Township website and given to the Courier Post for information.

ROLL CALL OF MEMBERS

Upon roll call the following were found to be present:

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

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

FIFTEEN (15) MINUTES OF PUBLIC COMMENT

Motion of Fratinardo, seconded by Haas to open public comment. Voice vote – All ayes. Seeing no one wishing to be heard, a Motion was made by Loftin, seconded by Fratinardo to close the public comment portion. Voice vote – All ayes.

BUSINESS

A. Punam Corporation represented by Jonas Singer, Esq. – Re: Liquor License Ordinance

Jonas Singer, Esq. on behalf of Mr. Patel, owner of Punam Corporation, stated that he reviewed the minutes from past Council meetings as well as Planning Board meetings and he is bringing the matter back before the Council and asked that Council reconsider the ordinance that was pending with regard to the restrictions of liquor licenses within a 1-mile radius. There was much discussion on whether or not it is a matter for zoning or whether it is a legitimate ordinance where the town council should restrict the locations of past liquor licenses within the township. Mr. Patel is prepared to make a substantial investment within the township but it is in within that 1-mile radius. He stated that, as other attorneys have expressed, this ordinance lacks definition as to where that is measured from but he is asking Council to remove the ordinance altogether, stating that there is no legitimate reason why this ordinance exists. There are no other ordinances within the town that protects any other types of businesses. These types of ordinances are meant to try and avoid and deal with nuisances that exist because of the use of the property but this use does not create that and they believe that this site will clearly accommodate the new store that is proposed. He asked that Council present the ordinance once again for public comment and vote. He believes the last time it was sent to the Planning Board and the Planning Board sent it back to Council and stated that the proposed use was in accordance with the Master Plan. It is in a zone that is permitted as a retail use and he asks that the ordinance be brought back to be considered again.

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Council discussed reconsidering the ordinance, which would have to be reintroduced and then put on for second public hearing and second reading. Council agreed to review the ordinance on a motion of Loftin, seconded by Frappolli.

Upon roll call, Council voted as follows:

- YEAS: Fratinardo, Loftin, Frappolli
- NOES: Baldorossi, Haas
- ABSENT: None

Majority vote – Motion carried

B. Florence Housing Authority

Kim Mattson and Ed Jimenez, appointed Commissioners of the Florence Housing Authority, explained the mission of the Housing Authority and explained that it is part of the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and they administer federal aide to local housing agencies that manage the housing for low income residents at affordable rents. They explained that there are three housing authorities in Burlington County, one in Beverly, one in Burlington City and one here in Florence Township and it is limited to low income families and individuals and eligibility is based on annual gross income. The Housing Authority checks references and priority is given to Florence Township residents.

The Housing Authority is made up of seven members, who meet monthly and serve 5-year terms. One member is appointed by the Department of Community Affairs, one is appointed by the Mayor and there are five Council appointments. Once appointed they have to attend classes and get certified within 18 months through Rutgers University. These classes are funded through the Housing Authority. Once they finish the classes they attend annual conferences to keep up with any changes in policies, etc. Currently there is a vacancy because the DCA appointment passed away and the current Chairman is up for reappointment this year.

Council asked the Housing Authority representatives a series of questions:

Council Representative Loftin asked the primary responsibilities for the Board and do they oversee any of the policies of the Housing Authority or do they just govern and/or look at the budget material? Mr. Jimenez explained that the policies are built and, based on the term, each policy is renewed and refreshed. HUD requires most of what the rules are. They decide the income requirements and the rent rate adjustments.

Council Representative Loftin asked what the working relationship was between the Director and the Board, and does the Director report to the Board? Ms. Mattson explained that the Director is hired by and reports to the Board. It is a paid position and there is one person in the office and a part time maintenance person.

Council Representative Loftin asked who signs the director's paycheck? Ms. Mattson stated that the Board reviews all bills and his salary is on their bill list. They share their bills with Beverly Housing Authority and that is why there are payments to the Beverly Housing Authority on the bill list.

Council Representative Loftin asked how the Housing Authority Board incorporates feedback from residents? Ms. Mattson stated that they have public comment on the monthly agenda and they are welcome to attend the meeting and they also can express their concerns to the office and those concerns will be shared at the meetings.

Council Representative Loftin asked if there are any long-term goals for the housing authority, any other initiatives to make the units self-efficient and sustainable? Mr. Jimenez stated that there is a lot of effort

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and budget that goes toward renovating and repairing apartments after move outs. The primary goal is to have the empty units flipped and ready to serve residents in need. That takes a significant effort and time. Ms. Mattson invited Council to come and tour an empty apartment and Council Representative Loftin stated that the Housing Authority does a great job and the apartments are nice.

Council Representative Loftin asked if there are programs for financial literacy or mental health programs or classes or initiatives that the Housing Authority directs tenants to? And what, if any, are the restrictions from HUD? Ms. Mattson stated that she works for the County Health Department and through human services information is forwarded to her and she makes sure that she forwards it to the office and lets the residents know. It is up to them to decide if they want to participate or not. They have a dental van that comes around, they supply lunch in the summertime and different programs through Family Services. They are in the community and the office staff also knows they can reach out to the county and if someone has a need we can direct them. There are a lot of services.

Council Representative Loftin asked if there are any opportunities for partnerships from a local business or a 503c donation, and would the Housing Authority be opposed to receiving a donation? Are there issues with receiving donations? Ms. Mattson stated she is not really sure, as commissioners they do not do the day-to-day so she would have to do some research.

Council Representative Frappolli asked how important the experience is of the people that are there as commissioners to work as to the training period for individuals that come in? At some point in time there is going to be change and new people coming in how important is the experience of people who have been there? Ms. Mattson explained that depending on time spent as a commissioner, different experiences and knowing what issues come up throughout the years as well as their independent jobs during the day, they are volunteers and they are there because they care about people.

Council Representative Frappolli asked how he chairperson of the board is chosen and how do you as commissioners choose your administrator for the Housing Authority? Ms. Mattson explained that the commissioners vote and they were there when they came so they have not come to that road yet. They have an association with the state that could advise them but they have not had the need to discuss it.

Council Representative Frappolli explained that in general conversations with residents, they stated that it is not always easy to find these people and that is why sometimes they share with someone else. Ms. Mattson explained that it is more of a specialty so she is unsure, they have not looked or had any discussions about it.

Council Representative Frappolli was present at one meeting and hopes to get to more, because he thinks it is important for an open line of communication but, as Ms. Mattson mentioned, residents do have the ability to come but is there another way that people share their concerns/challenges? Ms. Mattson stated that they do have to pay their rent monthly so they come to the office to do that or they could write a letter.

Council Representative Loftin asked about the Saturday meeting they had in December and the fact that a lot more people showed up than at the meetings that are held at 6pm on Wednesday evenings. Is it easier for these families to come on the weekend as opposed to right after a work day? If the parents are active in the community, then they may have trouble making a weeknight meeting.

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Council Representative Frappolli stated that he was trying to learn more about the situation. One of the reasons for this meeting is because we want to make sure as we move forward, we are not only assisting, but we are also taking in mind the residents to have their concerns be heard and dealt with, etc. He was told that the budget was struck for this year and asked if they are aware of that? Is there plans in the budget for the recreational area for the children? Mr. Jimenez stated that there is no allocation in this year's budget but it is being considered in the future. HUD and the state both approve the budget and then they can move forward. Research would have to be done, engineering would need to be consulted, the type of equipment wanted, there are a lot of details that go into it.

Council Representative Loftin said that historically there has been a playground at Maplewood and it needs to be restored and she does not understand why it can't be done. When she brought it up to the director in October, he said there were parks in town where children could go to but the children are young and could not cross Front Street by themselves. We are not trying to build something new we would be restoring something that was already there.

Council Representative Frappolli stated that Council is trying to work with the Housing Authority so that we can make our residents in this community safe and have peaceful environments that include recreation. Mr. Jimenez said that the primary priority is to retain the structures themselves, providing maintenance when it is necessary, finding people to do the work, etc.

Council thanked the Housing Authority for coming in and for their volunteerism in the community. Council Representative Frappolli recommended forming a subcommittee to meet with those individuals on the Housing Authority up for reappointment before appointing anyone to the open positions.

Council Representative Baldorossi made a Motion to reappoint Ritch Woolston to the open position on the Housing Authority, and it was seconded by Haas.

Motion of Loftin to Table the appointment and meet as a subcommittee to hold interviews, seconded by Fratinardo.

Upon roll call, Council voted to Table the appointment as follows:

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

ACTION

- A. Night at the Races, On-Site 50/50 and On-Site Merchandise Raffle on March 28, 2025 at Francis Robbins Post 194, 601 Broad Street, Florence, NJ from 5:00 p.m. to 12:00 midnight for the Florence Township Civic Association to benefit Francis W. Robbins American Legion Post 194.

Motion by Fratinardo, seconded by Loftin to receive and file. Voice vote – All ayes.

B. Resolutions

- 2025-46, Authorize Appointment of Water & Sewer Engineer
- 2025-47, Regarding Military Surplus Equipment
- 2025-48, Authorize Appointment of Special Projects/Conflict Engineers

Motion of Fratinardo, seconded by Haas to vote on the Resolutions separately. Voice vote – All ayes.

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Motion of Loftin, seconded by Haas to approve Resolution No. 2025-46.

Upon roll call, Council voted as follows:

- YEAS: Haas, Loftin
 - NOES: Baldorossi, Fratinardo, Frappolli
 - ABSENT: None
- Majority vote – Motion defeated

Council Representative Loftin asked if this can be up for discussion again. Council is saying no but no recommendations are being made to find a new engineer. Township Solicitor Wright explained that the current engineer serves until the replacement is filled so the current engineer will continue in that position until the Mayor nominates and Council approves appointment of a successor.

Motion of Haas, seconded by Fratinardo to approve Resolution No. 2025-47.

Upon roll call, Council voted as follows:

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

Motion of Loftin, seconded by Haas to approve Resolution No. 2025-48.

Upon roll call, Council voted as follows:

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

C. Financial Correspondence

- Court Administrator's Monthly Report for December 2024
- Tax Collector's Monthly Tax Report and Monthly Water & Sewer Report for December 2024
- Tax Collector's 2024 Annual Statement for Receipt

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

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

Upon roll call, Council voted as follows:

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

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Motion of Loftin, seconded by Fratinardo to open the meeting to the public at this time.

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Michael Muchowski, 1337 Maple Avenue, commented on statements made by Mr. Singer earlier in the meeting that liquor stores are the only class of business that is restricted within the community. Zoning, in and of itself by its nature, has some restrictions based on uses and appropriating areas among other things. He thinks it is a great idea to put it back on the agenda but suggests utilizing the next work session as a learning and teaching session regarding some of the ins and outs of the history of that particular ordinance, what brought it to fruition and then putting it on first reading after Mayor and Council can get a thorough understanding of it.

Seeing no one else wishing to be heard, a Motion was made by Loftin, seconded by Baldorossi to close the public comment portion. Voice vote – All ayes.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion of Loftin seconded by Fratinardo to Adjourn. Voice vote – All ayes. Meeting adjourned at 8:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Nancy L. Erlston, RMC
Township Clerk
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